BROUGHTON

A NOVEL

By A. S. ARNOLD

D. Westlake

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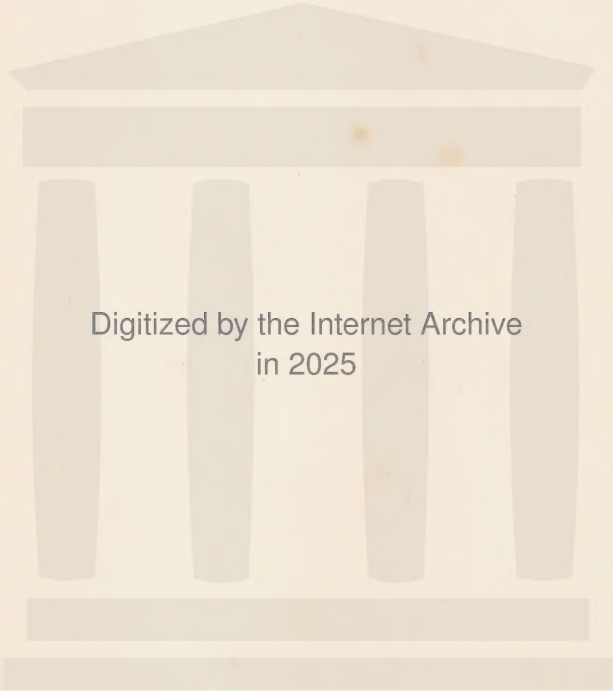
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BROUGHTON.

A Novel.

BY

A. S. ARNOLD,

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF THOMAS CARLYLE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BROUGHTON.

CHAPTER I.

No sooner had Sister Grey passed through the Rectory gates than Jessie returned to her room and put on hat and mantle.

"Mother, I am going to the Hall," she said, peeping through the dining-room door. "I will not stay late."

"It would be much better to have Gerrie here, dear," replied her mother. "I don't like you to be there so much."

"Only this evening, dear. You see, I have given up teaching them, and the Squire wishes to consult with me respecting Vernon's school, his books, etc. You will not mind this once?"

"Do not stay longer than absolutely necessary," replied Mrs. Jewel, who was beginning to

fear that the somewhat fascinating Squire was doing his best to turn her daughter's generally wise little head.

Jessie appeared remarkably collected as she gave the required assurance; and she was no sooner out of sight than the mother was at once absorbed in some unimportant matter concerning her beloved Dickie.

Jessie walked with a firm step through the Hall side-gate, up to the old porch, where the unrestrained honeysuckle twined itself overhead. The sun had almost set behind the high wall and lofty trees which secluded the Hall from the gaze of the common herd. Everything had a look of the peace of eventide, every sound was hushed; and Jessie stood a moment and listened to the palpitation of her own heart, dreading to ring the bell, and so break the silence.

But there was no need to make that effort. The heavy door opened, and the Squire himself stood there, with hat in hand. He had seen her approach, and had been loitering, to determine within his own mind, how to greet her. That she cared now, he had not the least fraction of

a doubt. It gave him a kind of delicious intoxication to see her face change according to his will. When he clasped hands cordially, with the undisguised pleasure he always felt in a moment of her society, her face answered to his in smiles and manifest delight; when he hurried by with a passing word or mere raising of the hat, how well he interpreted the look of blank disappointment and sadness that shadowed that fair face! But this evening there was a look in her countenance that warned him not to trifle with this child. She seemed possessed with the gravity of an elderly woman. In his turn he felt going white and cold with agitation. He caught her hand, held it fast, saying:

"Come in. I must speak to you."

For a moment Jessie felt helpless. His strong grasp was overpowering. She accompanied him to the library, and sat down with a feeling of utter weariness and incapability of contending with this great, strong man, whom she *almost* loved.

"You are ill and weak, and I'm an utter brute," he began.

She made no reply. What could she say? She could not hate or despise the man, wicked as she considered his conduct to be. What a troubled life he had had! Spoilt and indulged through childhood, allowed to riot in youth, inheriting property weighed down by mortgages, married for money to a woman for whom he had no attachment, bewitched by a young, half-educated, pretty girl, wearied to death with her narrow ideas, her small vulgarisms, her manifest inequalities even with his own gentle daughter, and now—passionately, madly attached to herself, who was as deliberately resolved to refuse to be his—Jessie pitied him. She pitied herself, too, and Catherine Grey. Oh, why are such mad marriages ever contracted? Perhaps she had no idea of the tenth part of this man's back life! What other stories might she not still learn?

They stood silently confronting each other for a moment, both overcome by the force of their own thoughts; then the Squire walked to the window, and stood looking out on to the quiet lawn. It soothed his heated brain, calmed his wild pulse.

Meanwhile, Jessie concentrated all her energies in attaining self-control. There was no doubt a mutual attraction between these two extreme characters. His eyes had a mysterious power in arresting hers, and seemed to penetrate into the inmost recesses of her heart; and he felt that there was a mutual, indefinable recognition of what was transpiring in the mind of each. During the long silence, the spiritual contact between them was much stronger than the personal.

"Jessie! I beg your pardon," said the Squire at last, his whole manner manifesting a peculiar and delicate homage; for before this young girl he experienced a kind of awe, that had been entirely absent hitherto in his dealings with any fellow-creature. He absolutely dared not commit himself to any extravagance of word or deed towards her. To him she was something holy and heavenly, and he would rather die than shake her trust in him.

Though agitated, she was not afraid; she felt her power over him, too.

"I have been a bad man, child," he said, leaning over the mantelpiece; "bad, unworthy to

be in your society; but, good God, how I love you!"

She still sat silent. She had been feeling a kind of reverent adoration for this man; but the idea of his nobleness, of his superiority, was crushed. She still loved, pitied, sorrowed with him; but her idol was shattered into fragments. And, besides, the awful face of duty stared her in the face. To listen to his love-making would injure another—would, perhaps, lead her into the region of absolute guilt.

Clear and distinctly she spoke at last:

"You must never tell me so again."

"Why, in heaven's name?" he exclaimed, passionately; "but I will tell you again, and all the world besides, that you only—*you* are more to me than my own wretched, perhaps lost, soul. Nay, if you won't hear me, I know it *will* be lost irrevocably. Pray, *why* must I never say so again? Have your parents prohibited you from listening to me?"

"No, indeed."

"Has that witch Catherine been enlightening you, as she threatened?"

"She has. Poor thing! I am so sorry for her."

"Would you have me marry her? Would you have me perjure myself a second time, and bring down another edition of accumulated curses on my head and house?"

Jessie trembled at the passion in his voice.

"No, no; but provide for her, teach her boy to love and respect her, and certainly marry none other. She has that claim."

"And what of me—oh, Jessie, what of me?"

"Endurance. There is nothing else."

"Sorry food for the soul, or comfort for the body," he said, bitterly. "Besides, who on earth would imagine it to be my duty to marry this woman but your innocent, exalted little self!"

"Don't mistake me, sir. God forbid I should ever advise any one to marry one he does not love. It is the ruin of all social happiness, besides the sin of making false oaths."

"But not one in a thousand marry those they love best."

"Which accounts for half the misery of the world."

"How have you learnt that, chit as you are?"

"By life's experience," replied Jessie, quietly, "and have myself suffered through it. So did poor Catherine Grey."

"That woman is a fool; don't name her."

Jessie rose up to go. She had given him her decisive answer, as unchangeable as the law of the Medes and Persians.

"And you are going? and going to be a stranger to me henceforth, I suppose?"

Jessie's eyes filled. A stranger she could never be.

"Oh, no, no! a staunch, unchangeable friend always."

"But that won't satisfy me, I shall die of want," he answered. "I want you always, in my heart, in my home."

"That cannot be; indeed, it cannot be, sir."

"You must love some one else, then; you would not leave me so if you loved me, yet you have loved me, I swear it. Can you deny that?"

Poor Jessie! she was conscious that she loved

him still; but that marriage between them was impossible. The only thing that remained to them was friendship. And oh, she thought, is not such a friendship as strong, as faithful as love, for it is love ennobled by sacrifice?

"And will you never kiss me, Jessie, never express all the tender love you have enclosed in that little frame for me?"

"No, Squire Hoxton. Friendship requires no such demonstration."

"If that woman was out of the way, if she married another, would you love me then?"

"Oh, sir, don't! Your speaking so makes you dwindle in my estimation. I can only love what is noble and good. That is what you still *may* be."

"Might be with you; without you I shall be condemned to all that is evil as the only means to forget you. Are you going?"

"Indeed, I must. I promised my mother not to stay."

"Oh, Jessie, this is hard on you, too, child. You are grieved."

The sad pathos in his voice almost overcame her; but she mastered herself, and said:

"If you only will be good, and still be my friend, I shall be happy again, and Gerrie and I can work together."

"But how can I see you come in and out, meet you here, there, and everywhere, with this unutterable longing never, never to be appeased? Jessie, it is too much to ask. Have you no pity for me? Who would think so tender a frame could be guilty of such cruelty, and wear so hard a heart?"

"Oh, I hate to be cruel! I hate to pain you!" she cried, passionately, thus falling far short of the stoicism she had assumed. "But what can I do?"

Her hesitation revived his hopes. He drew nearer, took both her hands in his strong, firm grasp, looked down into her eyes with ineffable tenderness, and said, slowly and deliberately:

"Love me! I ask for nothing else for years to come—not even one kiss."

"I must only love what is noble and good," she replied. "Be that, and I shall do right to love you;" and so she left him.

The trying interview ended, Jessie went

straight home, feeling sick at heart and as weary as if she had walked miles. There was now a secret burden that she must carry week in and week out for no one could tell how interminable a time—a burden that would weigh her down sleeping or waking, and press heavily on her heart alone or in company. She must not talk about it to him who she knew was sharing it with her. The very fact that he suffered, too, but doubled its weight. He alone could lighten it, however, by showing her how nobly and bravely it might be borne. If only he would. She longed to confide in Arthur; even a cheery conversation with him would ease her heart, on some of his endless schemes for benefiting his fellows. She looked into his bedroom. The servant had been in and pulled down the blind, and turned down the bedclothes ready for his home-coming. Jessie shuddered involuntarily at the gloomy light cast on everything. The perfect order on his toilet table, drawers, washing-stand, was evidence enough how rarely he now occupied that chamber, which had all his young life been his sanctum, and frequently a very untidy one. Jessie was

gloomy; she had not seen Arthur once since he bade her so sad a farewell on the wedding-day, exactly five days ago. It seemed an age. It had not been intentional on the part of either brother or sister. But Arthur was never at home till midnight, and was up and out before Jessie was awake. He had been neglecting his duties she knew, to be at the cottage, or to wander aimlessly wherever his steps would lead. Jessie now longed for him as she stood in his vacant room, and determined to waylay him that night before she went to sleep.

But when Arthur had returned, after parting with Pattie that same night with the determination of mastering his emotions sufficiently to attend to his duties the following day, Jessie had fallen into a heavy sleep outside her own bed. She had watched and waited for hours after prayers, which generally took place between nine and ten. She had listened to the slow, solemn stroke from the old tower, ten, eleven, twelve, and still he had not come. She felt chilly, and threw herself on the bed, unwillingly falling into a deep sleep. About half-past one she was startled to find

herself in so uncomfortable a position, and, immediately remembering her resolve to give at least one kiss to her beloved brother, she stole to his door. Afraid of disturbing any one, even him if asleep, she did not knock, but tried the door. It was locked. That of itself was very unusual. Arthur was not wont to lock himself in. Jessie felt nervous fears, which, however, were quite unaccountable. She put her ear to the keyhole, and after assuring herself that she could hear his measured breathing, she quietly crept back to her own room. She missed Laura a good deal, who had always shared her room, and she wished she could keep awake all night rather than not give Arthur a kiss and tender words of sympathy. But nature, especially youthful nature, is exorbitant in its demands; it forced Jessie to close her eyes at last in restless slumber; and it was eight o'clock when the housemaid entered the room and pulled up the blind, letting in a whole flood of sunshine.

Jessie felt unusually depressed. All her bright young life seemed suddenly to have grown dark and inexplicable, and anxious thoughts of Arthur, as well as herself, added to her despondency.

"Is Mr. Arthur up?"

"Yes, miss, he is gone to the mine this morning, I think, for he has changed his clothes."

"Then I shall not see him again!" exclaimed Jessie, with a sensation more of foreboding than disappointment. "How stupid of me to sleep at all. How is mamma this morning?"

"She seems pretty well; breakfast is to be at nine, miss." So saying, the girl quitted the bedroom, and Jessie, after cogitating over her own and others' past, present, and future, made a final effort to get up, and was punctually in her place at the table as the clock struck nine.

But Jessie somehow was another Jessie. There was a new expression on her face, noticed at once by Reginald.

It was with difficulty she made a few commonplace remarks in answer to the same, and she had a greater inclination to sob than to swallow her breakfast.

"Poor Arthur has gone to his hateful occupation again," she said at last, with some irritation.

"I thought you admired his tastes," replied her clerical brother.

"I admire his sacrificing his tastes, rather," was Jessie's answer.

Reginald coloured. He knew Jessie read Arthur rightly. He knew that his own would-be satirical remark was unworthy of him.

"He's a noble fellow, a brother to be proud of. I only wish I were more like him," said Reginald, true to his own generous nature.

"I could wish he were a little less of a Don Quixote, however," continued the Rector. "We know unbeaten tracks must be trodden, unknown lands explored, dangerous experiments be risked; but we do not like our own boys to be the pioneers, and, in his case, there was not the slightest necessity. I don't see what good can be gained."

"Every method, every invention can be improved upon. Accidents are of such terribly frequent occurrence, and so far spreading and fatal in their effects, so disastrous to whole villages, that surely men, heroic men, must endanger their own lives for the good of a community. Arthur seems to have no other view, no aim in life, but to benefit others," replied Reginald; "we clergy, I believe, might do more than we do."

"Yes; you young men, with all these new-fangled ideas and notions, will, no doubt, try to reform the Church and the world. There are a great many improvements going on; but they have to be proved, sir—to be proved. We shall soon see the result of educating the masses, universal suffrage, etc. It will all end in revolution, nothing short of that; the country will be ruined."

"I believe such men as Arthur will eventually turn out to be of momentous influence in the future world, and always a good influence, in spite of what are considered their eccentricities. No one is more sensitive to the beautiful than Arthur, and others like him; but the thought of the majority of people being shut out from everything that makes life worth living for, makes it simply impossible for them to lead luxurious lives of selfish indolence."

"That is where Arthur makes his mistake," replied his father. "He imagines that these low people feel conscious of their immense needs, when they are really thickly padded with a coat of stupidity, which effectually precludes any such ideas. They firmly believe themselves and their

belongings as near perfection as possible, and the less they are enlightened on such points, the better for their happiness. Men must toil and moil for their daily bread, with hideous surroundings; if home were made beautiful, their labour would only appear more uncongenial from the contrast."

"Arthur does not find it so. Compare his home with theirs."

"No, because his mind is differently constituted; his habits and his education."

"But, dear father," said Jessie, "all minds have capacity for education. Ought it not to be fostered to the utmost; and men learn to know and feel that neither labour nor its wages are the real end of life?"

"What is the end of life?" asked Reginald, dreamily.

"To do good, and to be good, I should say," she replied; "for that is such a constant battle, and the victory and the reward in the higher life, not here at all."

"Appreciation of the beautiful, love of art, music, poetry, a higher state of culture leads to a higher life I suppose?"

"Natural beauty in any object never satisfies me," said Jessie, "either in sight or sound, nothing realises my expectations. Surely that is a sign that the highest is not to be found on earth."

"You are too imaginative, Jessie, dear," said her mother. "I am sure both your father and I have been most anxious to let you all have the very best advantages. You have been to the Exhibition in London, to all the wonderful sights there; you have seen the very best paintings, the most magnificent buildings, have been down the Rhine, and up the Malvern Hills; it is very sad to hear you still affirm that nothing comes up to your expectations."

"Not at all, dear mother," cried Reginald.

"Oh, mother, don't think I am ungrateful," cried Jessie, in the same breath. "The fault, or rather the cause, is all in myself. I shall be satisfied some day, and I am very glad that God has given me power to imagine even better things than all these."

"Young people indulge in such rhapsodies nowadays," said the Rector.

"Dear papa, there is nothing like going to church to teach us to indulge in them—if we only believe what we hear there."

"Perhaps it is a good thing, after all, that the majority do not," said Reginald, laconically, rising from table, and so terminating the unsatisfactory conversation.

CHAPTER II.

Jessie scarcely knew how to dispose of herself that morning. She trembled at the thought of going to the Hall, or even to the gardener's cottage to see Pattie, fearing that she might meet the Squire. She was enraged with herself for inwardly longing to see him, to be quite convinced that he had recovered his usual equanimity, and was not looking miserable. Of course, he deserved nothing else; but then she was only very tender-hearted, and would heal the wounds of all those dear to her, even if, by so doing, she inflicted a few extra ones on herself. But his wounds some one else must heal; she dared not attempt to do so, and therefore she dreaded to see him, for an extra line of care on his face, or cold, averted looks, she knew would be very hard to bear.

What a change had come over her! Every room in the house appeared unusually gloomy, and settle herself down to needlework, or music, or even reading, she found a hopeless task. So she wandered about listlessly, with a heavier burden than *ennui* to weigh down her spirits. Her mother met her on the stairs, with that new, woe-begone look on her generally bright, young face.

"Why, Jessie, my dear, how uncomfortable you seem! Why don't you employ yourself in some lady-like way?"

"Mother! I don't think I like to be a lady; the life is so insipid."

"Ah, you are craving to do something remarkable, I suppose, not content with the little lot portioned out for you."

"One is not obliged always to remain engaged in only finikin stupidities, are we, mother?"

"'The daily round, the common task, will furnish all we need to ask,'" replied her mother.

"Only let it be a round of usefulness, and a task worth performing, at any rate," replied Jessie. "Young ladies seem to be born for no other purpose than to trifle. Even when they get married,

it depends all upon circumstances whether they find a wider field upon which to exercise their brains. God has not withheld these from them, however desirable it may appear to *men*, that He should have done so."

"Dear Jessie, you shock me, my child. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, dear mother; but I am a discontented wretch, and only real hard work can make me what I ought to be."

"Well, dear! Your mothers are coming this afternoon; *that* is a favourite plan of yours. Have you no preparation to make for them?"

"Oh, yes. I had almost forgotten them. I will always set the room out myself on these occasions if you don't mind."

"Anything to make you more contented."

So Jessie kissed away her mother's anxiety, which she knew was never very deep about *her* concerns, and went into the back sitting-room. This had formerly been school-room, then study, and now was turned into a parish room.

The fitting up of the room had been left to

Jessie and Gerrie's superintendence, and they had determined that everything in it should be simple and strong, such things that poor people might have in their own homes. The floor was covered with oil-cloth, the table was plain deal, well scrubbed till it was glittering white, and in the centre of it stood a common flower-pot, coloured with red ochre, and bearing a lovely blossoming rose-tree. The chairs were bright, clean kitchen chairs, with a few softer ones for the older mothers. The window was open, letting in the soft summer air, redolent with roses and sweet-briars; the peaceful buzzing of a large blue-bottle fly was heard distinctly, as in bewilderment it endeavoured to fly through the upper panes of glass, and the homely cawing of rooks in the tall elm-trees, in concert with the warbling of smaller birds, added to the harmony. But Jessie was in no frame of mind to enjoy the most musical sounds or the most charming scenes. All seemed but as a mockery to her disquietude. However, she soon made what alterations were required in the arrangement of

the room, dusted the books and furniture, and then sat down in hopeless consideration as to what she should do next.

"If I were a man, I would never be a clergyman," she said aloud, "I would prefer regular occupation, however monotonous. If I had been a man I would carve out some new path that would be useful to the many. It is quite a shame to think of the hours I have wasted trying to teach one poor wretched boy, and he taking to books as willingly as a cat to water. Oh, Arthur! *you are wise.*" Having thus soliloquised, she got up, exclaiming:

"What shall I do next?" She placed the large waste-paper basket full of materials for the mothers on the table, with all necessary sewing implements. Presently the inclination to take her walks abroad was too strong to resist, so she went upstairs and put on walking apparel. Naturally she glanced at herself in the glass, and discontentedly thought how ugly she looked. She whispered to herself that it was little likely any one would ever love her again as did the Squire. She almost felt inclined to question

whether she had done wisely in refusing him so point-blank.

"But why would he have been truer to me than to others? He has no doubt sought the love of a good many, for he has evidently had few scruples to restrain him from doing whatever he liked. He shan't spoil my life, however, for I am determined it shall be one worth living, in spite of everything and everybody."

She went out and found Dick playing on the lawn, eager to accompany her. It was not altogether agreeable to take him. She might meet some of the grand people of the neighbourhood, who would pass unpleasant comments on his deformity. But she conquered her foolish reluctance, and taking his thin, misshapen hand in hers, passed it through her arm, and walked on to the high road, brave enough to defy the world.

Dick was delighted, and chatted and laughed in his infantine way unceasingly, and painfully Jessie tried to respond. They went into Daisy Meadow and gathered field flowers, and, as they returned, met all the happy school children

going home to dinner. Some dropped curtseys, some smiled and nodded, and all looked with various feelings on the poor young gentleman, who, in spite of his utter imbecility, they believed to be their superior by right of birth, parentage, and social status.

Jessie was in a philosophic humour, and began silently commenting on the sense of inequality that seems so natural to most of the "lower orders." Was it reasonable? What is it in us that arouses their respect? Thoughts crowded upon her; but she arrived at the conclusion that it was really their want of education that induced them to put so high a value on so much that was utterly worthless of itself. "Money, and what money can obtain, is their god," she said to herself. "Our education, superior manners, and richer surroundings, combined with the disrespect with which they are treated themselves, awe them. How stupid it is."

Jessie left Dick at the Rectory gates, and then ran to the Hall cottage to have a look at poor Pattie, whom she found very weak indeed. Good Mrs. Tupman had, with neighbourly kind-

ness, taken the younger children into her capacious kitchen, to feed them with her own family, and the cottage was thus kept quiet. The end was evidently very near. Dr. Butt had just left, and had whispered gentle words to the dying girl that her little day was fast closing; and Pattie, quite undismayed, had again turned her thoughts to the beautiful Abbey service, and was anticipating the heaven to which she was going with longer aisles and more beautiful arches, down which she would hear floods of music of unspeakable sweetness.

"Eh, Miss Jessie, it'll be such a sight," she whispered. "I aren't a bit afraid. I long to go. The doctor says *I shall*, maybe this very day."

The words came one by one, between the gasps.

Jessie tried to restrain her tears as she held the transparent hand, and looked down into that beautiful, emaciated face, which, in spite of the difficult breathing, wore no look of mortal agony. Before long, before many hours, this living, speaking, beloved form would be a dead, inanimate thing of the irrevocable past.

"No, there is nothing to fear, only to hope, dear," she whispered, kissing the clammy brow, upon which already the dews of death were gathering.

Mrs. Atkins, gently wiping her step-daughter's face, said:

"Miss Gerrie is going to stop with her this afternoon, miss, so you will not have her at the meeting."

"Please send one of the children to ask Miss Gerrie to come and speak to me," said Jessie.

The woman went into the farm-yard, and in less than ten minutes the two young ladies were greeting each other with all their usual affection.

"Arthur entreated me to be here as much as possible to-day," said Gerrie in a whisper, "because of his own unavoidable absence. I only hope she will live till he returns, darling. Jessie, papa and I are going away next week; what shall I do without you?"

"Are you really? Where is Sister Grey?" asked Jessie.

"Gone out somewhere, but she will be back

this afternoon. I don't think Pattie cares to see her much. Do you ? "

They went outside a few moments, and there conversed. Pattie looked at them searchingly as they returned, as if expecting to see some one else. She closed her eyes again, with a look of slight disappointment; she did not speak, and thinking she was dozing, they left the cottage together.

" Where are you going, Gerrie ? "

" To town first. Papa seems much annoyed about something, I don't know what to say or do to please him."

Jessie only remarked that it must be a difficult position for her ; when Gerrie cried out :

" Indeed it is ! Sometimes he seems so irritable I dread a scene with Vernon or the servants. But he is never happy as he used to be. Do come in this evening for a change."

" I cannot tell if it will be possible," replied Jessie, with an inward longing to give assent.

They parted at Mrs. Earnshaw's door, for Jessie had managed to avert the necessity of

passing through the Hall grounds, by leading Gerrie through the farm-yard, and out into the road.

At about half-past two, more than a dozen women of various ages were assembled in the parish room. Jessie had determined not to make it a religious meeting, but a social one. Not that religion was prohibited by any means, only it was not forced upon the mothers, because they were poor and uneducated. She wished them rather to see religion, than to hear about it from her. She met each one as they came in with a warm shake of the hand, and with various kind inquiries. She liked to see them amicably chatting with each other for a certain time. When they were all seated, and the work begun in good earnest, she read aloud. The book was not beyond the capacity of her hearers, and occasionally she stopped to discuss some subject that she hoped would call forth their own ideas. Very quaint, original ideas they were, sometimes, quite as bright and intelligent as those heard from the lips of their superiors, the farmers'

wives, butchers, bakers, or grocers, or even ladies of higher social position, all of whom do not enjoy a monopoly of brains.

To Jessie, human nature was the one delightful study, in all its phases. There were no really bad people who cared to come to these afternoon gatherings; but, nevertheless, there was much inequality in physique as well as intelligence. How inexplicable, after the deepest study, is the mind of another! How impossible to fathom the inner workings, even of our inferiors!

Some of these women wore an expression of bland appreciation of themselves and their belongings — evidently considered themselves far above the level of their coarser, less well-dressed companions. They neither exhibited nor felt the sympathy of equality, even with those who, in the eyes of the young ladies, seemed precisely on the same footing; and Gerrie and Jessie were often infinitely amused at the assumption of one mother over another.

In the midst of their merriment, Gerrie sobered herself, and remarked:

"To nobles and princes, the difference, in a lower social status, must seem just as ridiculous in comparison."

That was not at all pleasant to reflect upon, and they resolved not to call that absurd in poor people, which was so much in vogue among the educated, in a much more exaggerated form.

"For, after all, we shall all of us become precisely the same thing in the end, when the man with the pale horse falls upon us with his sickle," she said.

Arthur, Jessie, and Gerrie were all united in desiring to make all their schemes in connection with the church realities, and no sham religious impositions. They believed that stronger doses of prayer or praise for the poor than the rich was sometimes nothing but manifest quackery—merely a means of procuring deference for those who conducted them.

If religion were really their ruling passion, it would betray itself everywhere, and not be put on and taken off like a cloak, according to the company they found themselves in, or the atmosphere they breathed.

It was during one of these pauses in the reading, when Jessie was making conversation for the people, that two or three boys tore past the window, as if pursued.

"It is young Joss Blower and Teddy Dark, all in their black," cried Mrs. Earnshaw. "There's summat amiss."

Jessie's heart beat fast for a moment as she glanced round at the faces, which now wore, universally, a look of blank dismay, terror, in some amounting to stupefaction.

"Don't be frightened; I will go and see what it is," she said, rising slowly, while her limbs trembled so that she almost tottered.

They all got up and followed her into the hall, one or two keeping in advance, close behind her, as she proceeded to the kitchen.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! I can niver tell her," she heard the cook say.

"But you must tell 'em all; they'll be wanted."

Jessie walked in as white as marble, gasping almost inaudibly:

"What is it?"

"Pit's fired, Miss Jessie!" cried Teddy Dark,

a favourite singer; "oh, t' pit's fired! Where's Mr. Arthur?"

The women heard, and then followed such an agonised cry of distress as had never yet resounded within those Rectory walls—a cry of weeping and wailing, that roused the Rector and his wife from their quietude, and made them also sharers in that tempest of sorrow. This time, as the cry of "The pit's fired!" reached them, they knew experimentally the agony of uncertainty concerning their *own*, that they had never known before.

"The pit—but what pit!"

The two lads despatched from their work at the neighbouring furnaces having delivered their message, had turned back, and were now tearing back to the scene of the disaster, leaving the women to follow in dread uncertainty.

In a body they left the Rectory, heedless of any articles they had left behind them; shawls, stray sun-bonnets were left hanging up; baskets and needlework were strewed about indiscriminately. The younger women sped over the ground as if borne on eagles' wings, while the elder followed, if more slowly, in no less agitation.

Reginald was out, Mrs. Jewel was in almost a fainting condition, while the Rector wrung his thin, delicate hands in wretched indecision as to his own proceedings.

Should they remain at home, still secluded, though in common agony with the common herd? Had not Arthur drawn them all nearer together, making them all at heart akin at such a season? Ought they to be overwhelmed, while their inferiors at once proceeded bravely to help or endure?

"No! no!" cried Jessie. "Mother, this is not a time to faint. We may be wanted. Arthur may be living, and in need, or he may be gone, and no one there to claim his precious" — oh, what! Terrible thought! and Jessie groaned. "Papa, come with me—now at once—don't let us be ashamed to share the common grief."

"But, my dear, my nerves are already completely shattered. I have always purposely absented myself from such scenes. It would overpower me. I could be of no use."

"Then I will go," cried Jessie, as her mother sobbed aloud.

It was an absolute relief to the distracted parents to see her with mighty efforts control her emotion. She kissed them both tenderly, Mary Jane, the housemaid, fetched her hat, and accompanied her down the broad turnpike road, where they could discern crowds of people before them.

"Oh, Mary Jane, I'm ashamed to be the last! Let us run, too, and overtake them."

The whole population was aroused, for the explosion had been heard for miles round. The afternoon was now well advanced. Many men would have left the workings. It depended upon the hour he had entered the pit, if Arthur were safe or not, and of that there was no certainty. Still, Jessie clung to hope, though full of grief for the certain bereavement of so many mothers and sisters. The horrors thickened in her vivid imagination, as she looked upon the sky, still blackened with the volumes of smoke, vomited from the pit shaft, filling the air with quantities of fine soot, resembling a fall of drizzling rain.

There were a good many pits in the neighbourhood, and every known means was used to

guard against explosions; but inflammable air constantly accumulates, and, in spite of rules and precautions, accidents will occur.

Jessie, though full of fears too terrible to find expression, reverted again and again to the thought that God's presence was with her brother in life or in death; that he still *was;* that even though consumed to ashes, his mind was for ever indestructible, and after death might be even closer to her than in life. She said nothing; but strange and awful ideas rushed upon her as she hurried down that glaring road in such sad and unusual company.

"Ah, Miss Jewel! It's hard for you," said one old woman nearing on seventy. "It's not the first time I have had this fearful tramp to seek my dead. My God! it makes it no easier to be oft repeated; but there, we may find it less awful than we think. Keep your heart up, love."

And Jessie did bravely, the novelty of her position, no doubt, aiding her more than she knew.

They reached the mouth of the pit, now

crowded with spectators, held back by a cordon of men as much for the safety of those poor creatures who were frantic with grief and terror, as for security from hindrance to operations for the recovery of the men. The air was filled with a strong smell of sulphur that almost choked Jessie. While she lived she could never forget the awful scene, the cries of the women, unable to control themselves, or the agonised expression on the faces of the silent. Very few hopes were held out for the lives of any of the entombed men, and Jessie soon knew that the catastrophe had occurred in the pit in which Arthur was employed. It was fearful to see the wretched women press forward to identify the bodies as they were hauled up the shaft and laid side by side, and often piercing were the shrieks of the bereaved as they recognised the charred remains.

It was supposed that between forty and fifty men were incarcerated, and it was at the peril of their own lives, that relays of volunteers descended below, to rescue the living and bring the dead to the surface.

Jessie could not have been more than a quarter

of an hour on the horrible scene, when a murmur rang through the crowd as Arthur's dead body was laid, face upward, among the blackened corpses of his late companions. His face was quite recognisable, so that every one present identified his well-known and well-beloved face, so calm and still. The force of the explosion had evidently come upon him from behind, and dashed him forwards to the ground, thus saving him from disfigurement.

Jessie uttered no sound, she felt a momentary sickness overpower her; but some kind arm supported her, and led her close to the barrier that she might see him as closely as possible. It was Reuben's. She did not notice the tender, pitying eyes of the broken-hearted sympathisers as they made way for her approach; she did not hear their words of compassion or attempts at comfort. Some one in authority came forward and reverently inquired what had better be done with the beloved remains; while another laid a covering over the body.

"Send him home, please," said Jessie, with tearless eyes, but in heart-breaking accents; and

then she turned aside, and with a momentary forgetfulness of her own sorrow, she remembered her parents.

"Let us hasten home and prepare them for the worst."

The crowd made way in respectful silence as she passed through their midst, more than ever one with them now. Looking neither to the right nor left, she and her maid hastened homeward, all hope now lost in the horrible reality. At the Rectory gates only they paused.

"Oh, Mary, wait! What *shall* we say?" cried poor Jessie.

CHAPTER III.

In compliance with Arthur's express wish, Gerrie sat by Pattie's side, from a little after two o'clock, till four; during which time, the dying girl kept her eyes fixed on one spot, in the wall opposite, or dozed softly. Sister Grey came in and took her usual seat, facing the half-open door, and knitted. About three o'clock, in the solemn silence, they heard a sound as of distant thunder. Pattie opened her eyes, and looked round with a startled expression. Then, quite suddenly, a sweet smile of recognition took its place, and raising her thin hand feebly, she murmured: "Hush! Mr. Arthur's gone to sleep, don't waken him!"

They thought she was unconscious, and speaking in her sleep, so they made no reply. Pattie turned her head to the window, and her

back to Gerrie. She seemed to give a feeble sob, that was all. It was her last.

Arthur had preceded her but a few moments, and we believe welcomed her bright home-coming, where the inconveniencies of a *mésalliance* are unknown.

Sister Grey was the first to notice that the breathing had ceased. She approached the bed and bent down to see if there yet was life.

"Pattie's not here now, Gerrie. We need watch no longer. Poor Mr. Arthur! And some one else will grieve."

"Oh, Pattie! dear, dear Pattie!" cried Gerrie, falling on her knees, "I have loved you so long, and so well!"

And she sobbed bitterly with the cold, dead hand to her lips, which she kissed repeatedly.

"Gerrie, go home now, dear, you can do nothing further, and I am sure you have done what you could for the poor girl! Not many young ladies would have condescended to give the affection of a sister, to one in her position."

"Condescended, indeed! When we love, we do not condescend; and I loved Pattie ever since

I can remember. I cannot bear to leave her. What will poor Arthur do?"

She stood up, and almost passionately kissed the dear, dead face that Catherine Grey had moved into its natural position. Oh, how cold and white it had become in those last few moments.

Sister Grey was little moved, in fact, she thought it was a good thing all was over, and a great pity that most people take such a long time to die. Since the birth and slow death of her own firstborn, she had seen more than one go to their last resting-place almost unmoved; each time with a regret, that she still was left to struggle on. Under the circumstances it was not surprising that she could shed no tears over the lifeless form of her late troublesome charge, but was glad now to quit the cottage that other as tender hands might perform the last grim office for the dead.

Gerrie felt intuitively that she, too, must leave the humble friend of her childhood. Never in life would she hear again that familiar voice, or marvel at the strange apathy that used to

perplex her in Pattie upon matters which to her were of such intense interest. Gross ignorance, monotonous labour, combined with a strict sense of duty, have a dulling effect on the intellectual faculties.

"To mind one thing at a time," had been impressed upon Pattie by her parents and teachers from infancy. And that one thing being generally cleaning-up or washing-up, nursing babies, or "peeling taters," her imaginative organs had not been fully developed; but during the last year of her life they had expanded wondrously. Love, that all-powerful agent, had awakened her soul, and with it her mind also had asserted itself; sorrow, too, had worked mental wonders, and thus Pattie, whose last prayer was that Arthur might not be disturbed in his sleep, was a very different Pattie from the child we first introduced to our readers. And no one had felt more keenly the change that had taken place in her low-born friend than sensitive Gerrie. But now Pattie, the real Pattie, knew more than any of them. She had learnt the grand secret—the wherefore and the end of existence. We see through a

glass darkly; but our dead know even as they are known—marvellous change for them, and a *certain* one for us.

Gerrie went direct to the shrubbery, where she generally consoled herself in her minor as well as major miseries during the summer; for there she could weep unmolested when her heart ached, or read, when things were not transpiring quite to her mind, as they rarely did, for, like most exalted beings, terrestrial affairs disappointed her. Now her grief was real, not at all imaginary. She felt Pattie's loss would be a lifelong sorrow. There was an old dark beech-tree under which she sank down to think and grieve.

She was presently disturbed by a sound of many feet outside the impenetrable walls. The heap of refuse was no longer there upon which she could mount. Her sobbing ceased as she listened to a certain wail of unrepressed weeping, as of some heart-breaking distress. What could it mean? It was not of one voice, but of many; not of women only, but of men also, mingled with children's cries. The articulated expressions and interjections were unmistakable. Something

serious must have happened, and to learn the extent of the calamity, Gerrie ran to the Hall.

There she soon learnt the sad intelligence, and immediately forgot her own grief in longing to assuage that of those dearer far than herself. She was astounded at the intense personal sympathy she felt towards all at the Rectory the moment she heard of their affliction; it was mysterious, hitherto unimaginable. Their bereavement was indeed hers also. It would have been a double bereavement, that of Arthur and Pattie on the same day, had they had no connection whatever with the family of Jewel; but that she shared this sorrow with Reginald and Jessie, doubled its intensity.

The Squire, as usual, was supposed to be dozing at that time in the afternoon, and Gerrie would not rouse him with such dreadful tidings. She longed to go to Jessie, but was absolutely terrified to witness her suffering. Neither dared she venture beyond the gates which secluded them from their neighbours, for fear she should meet the stricken mourners.

Oh! what could she do? Inactivity was

torture. Yet how dare she venture to pass through doors where grim death had been so ruthlessly knocking, and where every one living must necessarily be in a kind of agony of excitement? Would it not be utterly useless to attempt comfort, to suggest consolation or resignation in the first awful hours of such calamities? She found Bolton in the kitchen, sitting in the window, with her head covered with her apron, sobbing aloud.

"Oh, dear Bolton, don't cry so!" was all she could say. "Oh, what can we do for them?"

There was an infinity of woe in her voice and looks.

"This caps all calamities I iver heerd on," cried Bolton. "Mr. Arthur, too. Oh, dear a me, dear a me! It's time we were all on us dead. It's as if t' world had come to an end."

Mr. Arthur, too! Yes, indeed, that was the most poignant, disastrous, most inscrutable misfortune that could possibly have overtaken the village, they both agreed; a loss that could ill be spared. He, whose example alone was an education to his fellows; whose ideals, though so elevated,

had been practically carried out, even to this fateful end. He, who was not only grand in theory, but in accomplished fact.

How to reach the masses? is the cry of the minister of religion, of the philosopher, of the Socialist, of the philanthropist. "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor," was the hard method the Founder of Christianity demanded of the rich young ruler; but He Himself excelled the demand. He came down and dwelt among them, not in superior dwellings, in grander style, surrounded by art and culture; but took upon Himself the form of a servant, toiled with them, suffered with them, associated with them; never descending to their level, spiritually or mentally, but dispensing with all material comforts and outward signs of superiority, taught His followers that he who would be the greatest among them must be the servant of all. Arthur, learning of Him, went and did likewise. His Christianity was something definite and tangible, read unmistakably by all who came into contact with him; though many declared that he carried out

the spiritual teachings of *his* Master and *theirs* much too literally.

Perhaps by his tragic death, he would teach most effectually how grand was his aim in life. Surely one common sorrow, one terrible calamity penetrating the Hall, the Rectory, the Lodge, as well as the humbler dwellings of the respectable, the cottages of the artisans or the hovels of the miserable, might be one means of bridging over that hideous chasm which separates the "haves" from the "have nots." Had he thought it would, no less gladly would he have descended the shaft that early dawn.

Reginald had been away from home the whole of that eventful, calamitous day. He had taken the pony-carriage some ten miles distant to pay a visit to a friend, who had lately been appointed incumbent to the living of Charlton. The drive there and back had been delightful, and the society of the Rev. Robert Mills most congenial, as he wandered with him through the village, in which was situated the partially ruined remains of a venerable castle. They had called

on the family in residence, had been led over the building, up the spiral staircase to the turreted tower, from whence they enjoyed a splendid view of some of the most charming Yorkshire scenery.

Robert Mills was naturally proud to exhibit to his late college friend all the advantages of his newly-acquired possessions, for a Church living is a possession, and a pretty safe one.

He was a High Churchman, and, as is generally the case, very energetic in his new parish work, anxious to draw rich and poor to his church. He spoke little of winning souls to Christ, but felt much anxiety to bring them within the pale of Church privileges. He was by no means a religious enthusiast, and doctrines and dogmas he hated to discuss. How best to use his life, and his yet tremendous energies, was the enigma he tried most earnestly to solve.

As for Reginald, he was in a miserable state of indecision. He detested controversy, had no ambition for popularity, and between Low Church orthodoxy, High Church formalism, Ritualistic processions, vestures, gestures, and asceticism,

together with Rationalistic Broad Church liberation, he floundered hopelessly, agreeing in some points with all parties and yet in all points with none.

In Arthur he found the idealistic dream of life made real, at the same time considered it both inconvenient and uncomfortable in practice. With his brother, Reginald granted that much of the misery of the world might be remedied; but only if men were willing to be martyred to the cause. It required people to do incredible things to make radical reforms, things that set one's teeth on edge, such as the sacrifice of personal interests, prejudices, old traditions, and comparatively new commandments; by these, we mean certain things upon which various bodies of the religious world have from time to time laid down their own laws, until the habit of so thinking becomes a second nature.

But these young clergymen loved pleasant things, as their fathers had done before them. They found it much easier to renounce theatres, cards, oratorios, and the race-course, than to take up a daily disagreeable cross. Much easier to

teach total abstinence from alcoholic drink, than to abstain from the pleasures of society, the praise of men, the respect for the golden ring and the rich apparel.

Reginald had no presentiment of evil as he and his friend wandered about in pleasant conversation.

But the brightest day closes at eventide; and this was the brightest one of them knew for many long days. The sun had set behind the long sweep of hills to the west, leaving the valleys dark under their shadows, before the friends parted—Robert Mills to some parish meeting, and Reginald for his quiet drive homeward.

His old horse trotted gently up and down hill and vale, Regie cogitating peacefully many subjects they had been discussing. At last they reached the common. It was getting late, most of the shutters were closed, and the dim candlelight was visible upstairs in the cottage windows. Regie did not hear the remarks of more than one group of women he passed, as he bade them

a pleasant good-night. They scrutinised his face and whispered: "He knows note about it."

Not one of them would have cared to enlighten him as he hurried homewards, or willingly attract his attention. On reaching the Rectory gate, he found the windows all darkened. No lad came to open the gate; he had to get down and do it himself, and to lead the horse round to the back. Where was the boy? From the stables he thought he heard sounds of sobbing.

"Come, Morris, my lad! Where are you?"

The boy issued from the coach-house, with eyes and face red with weeping.

"Why! what is the matter?" asked the young master, kindly.

"Oh, don't akse me, sir, please don't akse *me*."

Reginald's heart gave a tumultuous bound. Making no answer, he passed into the kitchen regions, which he found mysteriously deserted. No one dared meet him to break the news. He went into the dining-room, it was empty; to the hall, and there he saw Reuben May, with a face

like marble, leaning as if for support against the table.

"Good Heavens, Reuben! What *is* the matter?"

"Oh, Mr. Regie, that I should live to tell you!"

"Speak, my good fellow, shorten this agony."

"There has been an explosion."

It was enough. Regie gasped for breath.

"Bear up, sir. Think of Miss Jessie."

Regie tottered, he leant back against the wall, he felt sick with apprehension.

"My brother, Reuben. Where is he?"

"Where there is no more death, sir."

Regie looked round the old familiar hall; but there was nothing that could speak of the frightful catastrophe. Reuben had carefully removed everything into its original orderly state.

But Regie gazed as if in a dream. It was a moment of intense retrospection; old childhood days and later years seemed to pass before him in a flood of recollection. He could almost hear Arthur once again, urging upon him some act of self-sacrifice to which he felt he could

not accede. And now, in very deed, he had laid down his life for his friends.

Regie turned into the parish room. All there was confusion, just as the agonised mothers had left it. Without another word, he proceeded straight to Arthur's room. He stood at the door. All was silent as the grave. He entered that peaceful chamber of death, and saw a form lying still under the white sheet, and beside it knelt two girlish figures. The last faint streaks of twilight barely disclosed that solemn scene. Jessie rose, and flung her arms round Regie's neck and sobbed. Gerrie kept her face buried in her hands, and so they remained till Gerrie rose, when Regie advanced towards the head of the bed and removed the sheet from the face of their dead. Such a calm, peaceful face was there. Death had dealt kindly with him. There was no disfigurement, no discoloration to speak of his violent end. They stood silently looking down upon him, with thoughts too deep for utterance. They were each alone in this hour of agony, as souls must be.

"Girls, girls, listen!"

They turned their faces toward him. The dim light but barely revealed his impassioned features as they worked tremulously. His voice had an untold depth in it, as if he were struggling with physical as well as mental agony.

The head of the plain brass bedstead was to the left of the window, down one side of the wall. Reginald's eyes were bent on the face of that quiet figure stretched out before him.

"God and you are my witness that, from this day forth, I forswear a life of ease, comfort, culture. Difficulty, self-abnegation — nay, death, or such a martyrdom as this — shall be my allurements too. Oh, the awful, unspeakable influence of such a life as his has been! My brother! my brother!"

His voice was choking with uncontrollable emotion. He bent his head, and the chiselled face rested upon the icy-cold one of him who in the flesh heard not. And the girls knew that Arthur had not lived in vain or died in vain.

Gerrie, almost overcome with the tumult of agitation, drew near her love, and, in her hero-

worship, could have flung herself at his feet. He looked down on her speaking countenance.

"My little friend!" he whispered, tenderly.

And then he laid his thin, delicate hand on the bowed head and prayed aloud: "God help us all!"

CHAPTER IV.

The agony of uncertainty had given place to the horror of undoubted fact.

The stricken village vibrated as with one heart in the common calamity. Truly there was what the poor designate "lean sorrow and fat sorrow;" but sorrow in silk is no less awful, no less intense, than sorrow in rags. Indeed the necessity of action, or even the necessity of thinking of material things among the poor, lessens the dumb misery endured by the wealthy in their hours of bereavement. The poor are compelled to struggle daily and thus fight off grim despair.

Surely that night was a baptism of tears to the whole village. The ties of sympathy are equally strong, nay, often stronger, than those of blood.

Gerrie suffered no less than Jessie because Arthur was her friend and not her brother; and the Squire also was a participator in the general sense of hopeless bereavement that overshadowed Hall, Rectory, and cottages. He wandered about the scene of the disaster till long after midnight, as did thousands of people attracted by sympathy which is infinite, or curiosity which is much less infinite.

Wandering disconsolately up and down the blackened earth, upon which the stars of heaven still shone, the sorrow-stricken dreaded the approach of a dawn that could bring them no alleviation.

There lay their dead under the white cotton sheets awaiting their shrouds and their long, last narrow beds.

The darkened windows at the Rectory seemed to fascinate the people. There was one continuous stream of human beings passing backwards and forwards, and scarcely a sound to be heard among them excepting the thud of the many footfalls. At the gate they would pause and turn their tear-stained faces upwards and wonder

in which room *he* lay—he, who to them had been friend, brother, teacher.

The sun shone with its usual brilliance; but to them, sun and moon and stars were blotted out for a season.

"We shall never see his likes again," whispered first one and then another among the crowd.

"Death always picks the flower of the flock."

"Well, he'll reap his reward, bless him! Surely he, too, went about doing good like Him he were always a-talking on!"

"It weren't all talk in him though; summat more nor that!" Yes, it was a good thing for these rough children of toil to have travelled some years in their life journey with the living type of a true Christian man, young and inexperienced as he still was, when launched so suddenly into the unknown sea of eternity.

He had been found watching; and with this firm belief in their hero, the simple folks comforted themselves, with the only comfort possible, as they waited the great burial day. In the meantime Jessie also possessed her soul in patience, and, happily, found so many necessary

things to attend to, that there seemed little time for a thought of self. Her parents were paralysed. After the first terrible shock, when Dr. Butt was summoned, a kind of apathy of despair settled upon them both, and the subject was forbidden to be mentioned in their presence. To Jessie this was a relief. To have listened to their hopeless lamentations, their legion of conjectures as to what *might* have been had only *their* wishes been attended to, *their* opinions consulted, would have been unbearable. The end of time alone can solve such problems. That Arthur had neither lived in vain nor died in vain was the stern but unfaltering belief in the minds of all others who deeply mourned his loss.

He had aroused reverence in the hearts of those he left behind, awakened veneration towards him for the Christ-like within him. He had nobly striven to serve his fellow man by example and precept; he had died at his post, and now lay, with pale face, stilled into a divine peace. True, they would see him no more, hear him no more; but his eternal silence would speak still more eloquently than the living voice of thousands.

How describe the final scene! Why harrow the feelings of the writer and reader by entering into minutiæ!

Suffice it to state that the funeral of Arthur Jewel was that of the "common people." According to the principles for which he lived, there were no distinctive features.

Unfortunately, his parents had never entered into or comprehended the spirit that actuated him; but now Reginald seemed endowed with his mantle, and agreed with Jessie that, as Arthur had lived with the colliers, he should also be buried with them, that he and they, for whose benefit he had been willing to lay down his life, should in death be not divided.

So when the carts and hearses, draped with the solemn funeral paraphernalia, entered the churchyard gates, the simple hearse containing the remains of their beloved young master passed in among them, and the beautiful words of the burial-service were read over all alike. The church would only contain a limited number, so that the interments were of some hours' duration. The mourners came on foot according to express desire.

Among those who followed with Reginald and Dickie, were Mr. Roberts, senior, the Squire, Reuben May, and Jacob Atkins.

The Rector felt himself unable to bear the increase of a feather's weight to his sore affliction. He was completely unmanned, accustomed as he had been all his life to sit aloft in exclusive isolation from his brother men. What a delusion this English exclusiveness is, if men could only see it, especially among the clergy, who, in every tiny hamlet, as well as in crowded cities and centres of manufacturing industries, are set up, not as beacons to warn, but as living witnesses of the power of Christianity. The Rector, like many of his fellows, had disunited himself from his fellow-creatures, and now in their mutual misery, still felt that no grief was like his own ; no nerves so highly strung ; no power of suffering so intense; proud still even in his heart-agony, and yet in his pride doubly wretched.

He helplessly left everything to Reginald, who, at that time of universal bereavement, was at his wisest and best. He rose above his natural weakness and fastidiousness, and found an unknown

blessedness in having a common interest, even so woeful a one, in the people around him.

But like every momentous day, that day also vanished into the dim, indubitable Past, and it was with the Future that he and all the living had now to do.

That ever memorable week was ended. He must return to his easy, hitherto pleasurable curacy, where he had no grievances worth speaking of, and but few painful duties, where his days had been exceptionally fortunate, as are those of most young curates whose costly education is supposed to entitle them to comfortable berths, and much personal respect.

Reginald's private means were not ample. They would not suffice to marry upon ; and a curacy of one hundred and fifty pounds per annum, would not augment it sufficiently to justify him asking Gerrie to share his lot.

Yet the thought of her accompanying her father abroad filled his mind with anxiety. He must have betrayed his love to her, for true love words are not a necessity. Gerrie was barely

seventeen, and had no knowledge of the world, nor of the society of which it is formed.

Of course, when travelling with her father, who was well acquainted with all sorts and conditions of men, she, too, would be initiated into the world's ways.

Squire Hoxton would naturally hope to make as brilliant a match as possible for his only daughter, whose dowry was very small since Vernon had appeared on the scene.

If he exacted a promise from Gerrie, he knew she would keep it. Would it be right to exact such a promise?

Reginald knew that Gerrie was in no way inferior to him in heroism, that she was equally strong to suffer, to bear and forbear, and that no power on earth would compel her to marry *one* if she loved *another.* And child as she was, she loved Reginald. She had always loved him even at his worst; could she love him less, now that he had become all that she most reverenced, or could ever reverence in man?

Noble, courageous, self-sacrificing, sympathetic,

true, determined to conquer himself, his pride, fastidiousness, exclusiveness, selfish ease in this luxury-loving world.

He had not, he could not change his constitution, or his physical propensities; but his spiritual nature had asserted itself and dominated the lower. And Gerrie watched the conflict and loved and prayed for him.

The Squire hated to be alone in the evenings, and pressed upon Regie the charity of sitting up at night with him, and as Regie longed to open out his heart to Gerrie's father, he spent night after night listening to the Squire's interminable talk of himself, his past, present, and future; each of them refraining to speak on the very subjects that drew them together—the Squire of Jessie, Regie of Geraldine.

"How late you were again, last night," said Jessie, one morning, two days before Reginald's necessary departure.

"Yes, I know, it is always difficult to say good night at the Hall. It is almost unbearable to think of Gerrie travelling over the world with only the Squire to take care of her. I

imagine he has led a curious life, and he may lead her into no end of dilemmas."

Jessie's heart beat tumultuously. Oh! if Regie knew how near she had been to loving that man, what would he say?

"When are they going?"

"Next week. I tried to persuade him to let us travel together, as far as Rugby, but he means me to go first. He will, no doubt, try to get Gerrie engaged, or perhaps married, to some rich man, before he returns."

"Gerrie would never marry one she did not love."

"But why shouldn't she love a rich man?"

"Because I fancy she loves some one else!"

"Do you think it would be wrong for me to ascertain that fact?" asked Regie, his face set and white. "Of course I could give her up; there is nothing a man could not bear. Need I? Ought I? I have intended, night after night, to speak to her father; but I will first know what she would say."

"If she loves you, it would be kind to let her know how well you return it; if she does

not, it could do her no harm. Yet, I believe, it would make her miserable to disappoint you."

"Girls ought to know girls," replied Regie, thoughtfully, rising from the table and walking to the window, where he stood silently pondering some ten minutes.

From his calm exterior, when he again turned to his sister, no one could have imagined the internal agitation that reigned within. It might be years before he could claim her as his wife; but to know that, in spirit, in sympathy, she was his own, would make the darkest spot on earth luminous. He kissed Jessie as he passed her, sitting so quietly at the vacated breakfast-table, where she now presided, owing to her mother's indisposition.

"My brave little Jess," he said. That was all, and the door closed.

Jessie covered her hands over her eyes and pressed back the unbidden tears. Surely, here was another reason why she should turn a deaf ear to the godless, passionate father of the sweet girl her brother loved.

"If all the rest are happy, what matters it what becomes of me, so long as God finds me work to do? My greatest dread is enforced idleness, a veritable living death. I have no right to make Philip Hoxton happy; he has made others suffer; now God wills that I should make him suffer. Just retribution that some one should! Poor Kate! I must see her this morning, by-the-bye, and find out who induced poor Pattie to leave her home." Jessie got up, rung the bell, and quitted the room.

Brother and sister were bent each on an important interview.

Jessie and Kate met on the turnpike road, within view of the Lodge gates—according to appointment; Reginald and Gerrie in the Hall grounds—by accident. Jessie kissed Kate. At any rate, she had proved her equality, if not her superiority, over the man Jessie had *almost* loved. We say *almost* with emphasis, for if man or woman be loved in the ideal, and prove in reality altogether another individual, the love was only pure imagination for a creature of one's own brain.

"Now I hope you have quite made up your

mind to tell me all about poor Pattie," Jessie began.

"It could do no good, and might do harm," returned Kate. "Indeed, Miss Jessie, I am quite sure, after consultiug with my aunt, that it would be wiser and kinder to let the past be buried with the poor girl."

"Her character ought to be cleared from any aspersions that scandal-lovers may cast upon it. It is common justice."

"I don't believe any one really thinks ill of Pattie. If her father hears of any remarks, or wants to know, he is the right body to sift matters; no one else," said Kate.

"Then you will not tell me," said Jessie, reproachfully.

"I must not. Forgive me. You have been so good to me, so good to my boy, that my gratitude will never die; but indeed, Miss Jessie, I am under a promise not to say anything more of poor Pattie Atkins. Not one, but many are to blame for her troubles."

Jessie was uncomfortable. Her imagination ran riot as she walked on quietly by Kate Grey's

side. First she surmised one, and then another, as the chief actor in that wretched drama, casting them all aside as impossible.

"Does Miss Gerrie know?"

"Miss Gerrie? Oh, dear, no! Though I believe Pattie would have told her had she lived longer. What a mercy the poor thing never heard of that awful——"

She was afraid to finish her sentence as she looked on the slight figure walking beside her in deep mourning.

"Yes, thank God, she was spared that blow, poor girl," said Jessie, with a faltering voice. "Now they are both at rest with God."

"Do you really believe *that*, Miss Jessie? I hear so many things in London. It is impossible to keep one's faith unshaken; and if there is no future, surely the life of such as Mr. Arthur is thrown away like, and it seems such a pity—such a waste of the best, that is."

"The most cruel people in the world are those who try to shake our faith in a bright to-morrow. Amid all the cares and sorrows, the infinite grief of parting, the disease and death of our loved

ones, what alone can give a grain of comfort but the hope of reunion—the belief that nothing happens here but for some grand purpose? No one shall shake my faith; I would rather remain ignorant of all their wild philosophies. Don't listen to anything that tends that way, Kate; for even if you are convinced of the fallibility of the Bible, what good can it do you or anybody?"

"We could do more as we like then, without fear," said Kate, rather dubiously.

"We could not. If God made ten laws, man would make a hundred and ten, and the strong would force the weak to obey. The world would be ten times more cruel without God, or even without a slavish fear of Him. When do you return to London?"

"With the Squire and Miss Gerrie on Tuesday."

Jessie felt her colour come and go painfully. She was not jealous of Kate; if she could, she would have restored the Squire's affection for her. She could not analyse her own feelings towards Gerrie's father. She was so deceived in him—so bitterly conscious of his unutterable evil

doings, that she felt it an absolute degradation that he loved her so madly. That he did, she had not the slightest doubt.

So they paced the well-worn road, sometimes talking, sometimes mournfully silent.

Philip Hoxton avoided Jessie. He was waiting his opportunity. Reginald must be out of the way when he took his parting, and fortunately he had gone out with his gun, when the young man stood suddenly on the lawn before the pale, saddened face of his beloved. She met him with a frank smile, which soon changed to unusual embarrassment.

There was a searching, inquiring look in the blue eyes that met hers, that made her heart beat, and drove away all power of utterance.

Reginald held her hand firmly for a moment in the exquisite consciousness that he needed no further evidence of his power over her. One word would bind her to him for ever. Should he urge it, or should he lengthen out these delicious moments of trembling suspense.

"Are you glad to see me?" he whispered. "Look at me and tell me," and as she raised

her eyes to meet his, that sense of mastership, of possession, overcame all other, and he drew her close to his heart, and their lips met in one passionate kiss.

"You belong to me, Gerrie, to me, to no one else, don't you?"

Gerrie did not answer; she felt so surprised at the outburst from the usually calm, self-possessed Reginald.

Of course she loved him; but it was another thing to belong to him. The picture of her father, angry, forbidding, might rise up to claim her as his, and then what should she do?

He let her go, and felt angry with himself for his madness. They walked silently side by side down the slope, where they came to a seat exactly opposite the dining-room window.

Perhaps the Squire had been a witness of that wild scene, thought Regie.

"Sit down here by me, Gerrie," he said, commandingly, and she obeyed. "Where is your father?"

"He is out," she replied, in a low voice.

Again they were silent.

"Have I frightened you?" he continued, presently, as she sat close to him with face averted. "Don't you love me, Gerrie?"

"Oh, yes, yes! you know. But what will papa say?"

"When he comes back I will find that out," replied Reginald, his calm determination quite restored. "But I could not ask him for his child till I knew she would willingly come to me. It will be no life of ease I ask you to share with me, Gerrie."

"Nor do I care for a life of ease any more than Jessie, you know that, Regie," was the answer, resolutely given.

"My darling, if not easy, we will make it happy."

Like all other lovers they imagined that, together, any spot on earth would become a paradise.

Unfortunately those identical foolish lovers, when they become parents, are of quite an opposite opinion as regards their children.

So Reginald found the Squire, as they sat talking into the small hours in the Hall library, and,

strangely, the Squire not only appeared, but really *was* painfully surprised to hear Reginald's request. He was always so wrapped up in himself and matters concerning himself that, as yet, he had never speculated as to Gerrie's future.

Apart from him she had no business with any future. Being his peculiar property he meant to dispose of her according to his will. His will had always been *her* will as far as he knew. Was she, too, going to oppose him now?

"I tell you, Regie, it is preposterous. I have looked upon you lately rather as a brother. It would be positively hateful, detestable, to become your father-in-law. Besides, what are you to live on?"

"Both Gerrie and I have forsworn luxuries," said Reginald.

"Forsworn fiddlesticks! You must live and dress like gentlepeople, I suppose. Gerrie is accustomed to every comfort. Do you think that I shall marry her to any one who, however well intentioned, is utterly incompetent to provide for her such a home as she would have?"

Reginald did not know how to reply.

"Surroundings do not make happiness," he said at last. "Gerrie's happiness is surely the first consideration with her father."

"I don't know about that. There is no such thing as happiness. It is made up of so many ingredients, and there is always *one* missing. Her welfare, rather, is of most importance, and without substantial material comforts a woman's lot must be unendurable. At any rate, I cannot consent to allow my daughter to adopt a life of self-sacrificing penury. Very grand in theory, but awfully inconvenient in practice.

"Penury! Surely we need not anticipate that?"

"Besides, Regie, remember you are almost the only young man of her acquaintance. Let her see the world, and taste its sweets, before you bind her down to hard work. She shall have a change—go with me abroad, to Paris, Baden, Rome, and after that be introduced into London society."

"If, after thus being initiated into a life of pleasure, she still prefers to share my lot, you will reconsider your decision, sir?"

"Time enough for that. I may die, and so get out of the way. At any rate, don't write long, rhapsodical letters to her during her absence; and for my sake make an effort to fall in love with some one else, please. So much better for all parties."

Regie rose from his seat in a kind of desperation.

"There, now! don't be offended or hurt. What I have said has been all hard, common sense. There is no man I like better than you, Regie."

"You don't forbid my writing to her, I hope?" asked the young man.

"No; I forbid nothing, because forbidden fruit is always the sweetest, and I would rather make it bitter for you. Why, Regie, there will scarcely be a hundred a year for Gerrie. This property is frightfully mortgaged."

"Sorry to hear it, Squire, for the sake of your heir."

"The young scamp! He must work himself, or let it, after I am gone. I wish to Heaven I had had a profession. I shall make Vernon a barrister, he takes to lying like a cat to milk."

"Good night, sir," said Regie, coldly.

"Good night; don't let this affair spoil our friendship, my boy."

"It shall not," was the answer, and the young man hurried down the dark avenue and let himself out of the side gate, telling himself that without reciprocal esteem, there could no real friendship exist, and esteem was scarcely a sentiment he could entertain for Gerrie's father.

CHAPTER V.

JESSIE was tending her plants with Dick's help, when a note was brought to her. It was from the Squire, requesting her presence at the Hall that morning at eleven precisely. It was almost peremptory in tone, and angered her. If he had ever had a right as master or employer to command her, that right had now ceased. Yet she would go. She had no one to whom she could show the letter. Regie had returned to Worcester, and her parents had enough to trouble them without any additional worry over her concerns. She must fight all her own battles. At any rate, she had nothing to fear; so at eleven o'clock precisely she was ushered into the Hall drawing-room, which, some months back, had been so home-like to her.

It was upholstered in blue, casting a pale tint

on all the beautiful objects in which it still abounded — for Gerrie's mother had expended somewhat lavishly on articles of beauty. By decorating her beautiful old home, she had tried to induce her husband to spend his time within its walls. But the Squire cared for none of these things, and she failed in all her efforts to attract him. Jessie sighed as she took up an album from one of the small tables. She did not examine it, her hand trembled so. She laid it down again, and sat still for a moment. Still the Squire did not come; and oh, what could he want? She wished she had not obeyed his summons.

The door opened and Vernon entered; he ran up to her, and jumped on her knee boisterously.

"We are going away to-morrow; ain't I glad? I do want to go to school. Are you come to say good-bye?"

Jessie kissed him. She was becoming almost attached to the boy, who possessed scarcely one natural virtue. If ever he grew up a good man, it would be at the expense of all his inclinations.

"Of course, I must wish you good-bye, and do hope you will try to be a good boy, Vernon."

"I'm going to be a judge, some day, that is better than a parson. I shall wear such grand robes, and put on a black cap when a man is to be hung."

"Don't talk of that, Vernon."

"But that's just what I like. It'll be ever so jolly."

Here the door opened, and the tall, square-shouldered Squire stood a moment within it, looking at the two, the boy and girl, for Jessie looked scarcely more than a child, with the arm of young Vernon round her shoulder.

There was a world of tenderness in the Squire's face, though it was unusually white.

"What's the matter, father?" cried the boy.

"Be off to your own quarters!" replied Philip Hoxton to his promising son. "Out of the stables into the drawing-room, I suppose. Good morning, Miss Jessie. Will you come this way?" He held out his hand, in which she laid her gloved one, and then followed him into the darker library.

"Sit down and——"

She sat down.

"Will you take a glass of wine?"

"No, thank you?"

"You look pale and frightened," he said, as he stood leaning his back against the mantelpiece, and gazing down into her face, "and I—I feel desperate. It is a dangerous thing, child, to trifle with a man's mad love."

"I have not trifled with one; rather accuse yourself, Squire."

She spoke low, but firmly.

"You have loved me, Jessie; and now——"

"I loved not you, but an ideal; one that was true, at any rate."

"And do you mean to tell me that my love for you is false?"

"No, it is not false now—I do not doubt it; but—but I do not want it."

"Why? I have no wife. You don't call that woman my wife?"

"She ought to be. Besides, sir, you are not the man I loved. I could not, I do not trust you. I don't believe your word. Think how accustomed you must have been to deception,

for years and years. You see, I am not afraid to tell you the truth."

"You are not afraid to be cruel to cut one to the heart, who would as soon die as live without you."

"You have made others lay down their lives for you, Squire Hoxton. I know you have ruined three lives; and there may be others I know nothing of."

"Three!" he exclaimed. "Three! How do you know of three?"

"You embittered the life of Gerrie's mother; have you not told me that you married her for money only? Oh, the cruelty of it! And she lived to know it, and to die of disappointment."

"Romantic nonsense!"

"Then what of Catherine Grey—young, innocent girl?"

"Low-born, ignorant, empty-headed creature! Would you compel me to pass my life with her? But what of the third, Jessie. What of the third?"

But of the third Jessie would not utter one word.

Was it herself she meant? The Squire would have given much to have learnt that he had succeeded in making her love him so much, that her life would be ruined without him. But Jessie denied him that gratification.

"Who is the third, Jessie?" he whispered, softly, persuasively.

"You know that yourself, sir, best."

"And what are you going to do with your life, as you refuse to share it with me? Think again, Jessie, what a wreck I shall be."

"*I* don't intend to be a wreck; why should you?" she replied, coldly.

"Who would imagine such a wee frame contained such an unbending, obstinate spirit? It is not a good trait in a young lady, Jessie; scarcely natural, and by no means lovable."

And he drew himself up with assumed pride to his utmost height, walking towards the window.

Jessie rose. This was a good opportunity of leaving him; while he was proud and offended, not loving and persuasive.

"Good morning, Squire Hoxton. May I say

good-bye to Gerrie? I suppose you all go to-morrow?"

He did not answer, but stood motionless, gazing out on to the lawn, where the autumn leaves lay strewn about in the utmost disorder, and the sun in vain tried to struggle through the leaden sky. The scene was particularly sombre and cheerless. She waited for an answer, and her heart would beat and long to soothe, where she knew she had sorely wounded.

"Come here!" he said, at last.

She hesitated. It was no use. She had lost all faith in him. The casket was still beautiful and fascinating, but the living soul within was unstable, deceitful, cruel. He loved her, and while she remained unattainable, her value would be priceless to him; but once his, she would surely be cast aside to wither with harshness or neglect, as others had been. Fortunately for her she knew their fate, and was thus forearmed.

"What would you have me do?" he exclaimed, passionately. "I am mad to ask a chit like you for advice."

"And I am quite unable to give it, sir," she replied, quietly.

"Shall I tell you what you condemn *me* to do? You might have led me to better things, to a higher, purer life; but you absolutely refuse to perform the duty God Himself has given you the opportunity of doing. You thus compel me to resort to other means of making life bearable. I shall marry again another woman with money, and without any scruples as to how I spend it. How to kill time will be our mutual problem; and the wildest dissipation will be my only alternative. That will be your work; and when the end comes—which will most likely be with a bullet—you may triumph over the results of your obstinacy. When a man goes over to the devil, his steps are rapid, and generally tragic."

This did not persuade Jessie to change her mind. Indeed, his wicked language estranged her still further from him, and all her sympathies now went out to Gerrie, who had to accompany him on this wild search for a wife.

"Oh! may I please go to Gerrie?" she cried.

"Yes, go; but at your peril betray my madness!"

The two girls kissed and cried over each other, talking of Reginald and the prospective journey that was to be so effective in changing Gerrie's heart.

"You will help Regie to trust in me, won't you, Jessie? No persuasions, no commands, will ever turn me from him. If I do not meet him for thirty years I should be true, true always. Papa may not allow us to write; but it will make no difference—nothing will to me. Only, dear, you know I am very poor, and papa says a man is never happy long if he has not money enough; so if Regie should meet with some one who is rich, and he should love her, don't ever remind him of me. I only want Regie to be quite—*quite* happy."

Jessie listened, but in a waking dream. The Squire's terrible predictions concerning himself added to her many griefs. It was easy to assume hardness, but impossible to feel it. Even now

she wished there was any possibility of comforting "that bad man."

Was she right in trying not to love him because God had not given him as much of His Spirit as He had to some other men? Was it his fault that natural failings, and frightful temptations, and bitter circumstances had been too much for him? Oh, what puzzling questions! Is a man really a free agent when all these things are against him? Perhaps he had never as a child been taught the beauty of goodness, unselfishness, and truth. Didn't she know that he had not; and was he to blame for that? Oh, she must pity him, and forgive him for having made her love him while deceiving her so!

"Gerrie, go and find your father; I want to say good-bye to him. You start so early in the morning, and he has been so kind to me."

"Yes, Jessie, he likes you extremely. Wait a moment, and I will see where he is."

She returned with the intelligence that he was locked in the library, but that he would admit her.

Another terrible venture, but she must risk

it. She could not let him go without one more effort to arouse in him better, happier feelings. She knocked timidly, and was bidden at once to enter.

The Squire was sitting in his arm-chair, looking utterly woebegone. He did not even rise.

"Are you going to torture me further?" he said, bitterly.

Poor Jessie felt more inclined to fall on her knees and beg forgiveness; but her self-control again stood her friend.

"No, dear Mr. Hoxton; but I want you to say good-bye more kindly to me, and promise that you will try and forgive me if I have offended you."

"Oh, child! I only forgive when I have been wronged; and you have not wronged *me*, but I *you*. I only wish you had! But come and tell me what you will do when I am gone? Sit down, without fear; I am not quite a devil yet."

Jessie sat down.

"Will you pray for me when I am gone out of

your life — away from all these old, familiar scenes, where I have done more harm than good all my days? My love for you is the purest and noblest I have had all my life. I really seek your happiness. I would only be good and kind to you — and true, Jessie; true this time. But God denies me even the possibility of proving it. If there is a God, I have met with no favour from Him; I am non-elect, that is evident. I suppose you believe in that doctrine, and feel assured that I am predestined to damnation—eh?"

"No, I don't believe it. Arthur used always to say that predestined meant only foreknowledge. We are free agents."

"Ah, well! We don't know what we are, nor what the Bible means. That I am an unfortunate devil is a palpable fact, and that you are a self-righteous little Pharisee is another."

But he smiled as he said the last words—so far from unkindly that Jessie's eyes filled.

"There, I am a brute! It gives me exquisite pain to see how I can grieve you, after all. Dry your eyes. I will promise you one thing—that

I will refrain, for your sake, from becoming the consummate scoundrel I threatened. I will try to be worthy of my good little friend's better opinion. Nor can I blame you for withstanding my persuasions, with the remembrance of that noble brother's life and death still so near. But, Jessie, men cannot all be Arthurs, or even Regies. You are crying still; poor child—poor child. Would to God I had been a better man, that I might comfort you."

"Be that better man and you will," she answered, softly. "Oh do, *do!* for Gerrie's sake as well as mine."

"Poor, motherless Gerrie! She will remind me of you, and be still dearer for that. Yes, Jessie, with Gerrie ever at my side I shan't be able to go far wrong. Promise to think of me. Is that too much to ask?"

"I shan't help thinking of you always, at church and everywhere."

"It is a little hard to part, isn't it? even to my hard-hearted little friend. Terribly hard to me; nothing was ever so hard before. To-morrow, to-morrow! How black it will be."

He was trying to make it harder and harder for her. To regain her self-possession, which was fast ebbing away, she said:

"So Kate travels with you."

"With Gerrie, as far as London. We leave her there, and God grant I may never again meet with her on this side the many mansions."

"You would learn to say the same of me, perhaps," she said.

"If what? If you were mine to have and to hold for evermore? You know you are speaking what is not true. You know you are the only soul I have ever loved, or ever shall love during this segment of eternity. I might marry twenty wives; but should never love but one. Jessie, you love me, be true to me, worthless dog that I am."

"If I am true to myself, I shall be true to you," she replied, evasively. "Now I must go. Good-bye, sir; thank you for every kind word, and every kind deed——"

"And all my endless love and bitter disappointment," he added, taking her hands, and looking down with real tears in his blue eyes,

and a look of infinite tenderness on his still handsome face.

"Yes; I am grateful for the love that has grieved me so. When you and Gerrie are gone, what shall *I* do?"

He bent his head. He longed to clasp her in his arms, to kiss her passionately; but refrained from fear of displeasing her. Pressing his lips on her pale, cold brow, he said:

"If there is a God, may He bless and keep you, my darling."

She dared not trust herself for another look, another word; but stepped out and closed the door softly on his sorrow.

CHAPTER VI.

Gerrie felt anxious about her father; he looked so gloomy at tea-time, and scarcely uttered a syllable. It was not that his appetite failed, for he drank more than one cup of tea, and ate his usual amount of bread-and-butter; but there was a cloud on his brow, and a preoccupied air in his manner, unusual to him. Even Vernon was awed to silence.

"You are not afraid of poachers to-night, papa, dear, are you?" she asked.

"Afraid of poachers! Stupid!" exclaimed Vernon. "Fancy papa, a strong, tall man like that, afraid of poachers. Why, I could nearly knock one down myself. Look at poor old knock-kneed Jim Grant. When I come back from school I'll settle them all."

"Hush, Vernon, you talk such nonsense," said Gerrie.

"Do I though? That's because you are only a girl."

The Squire still made no remark, but toyed with his tea-spoon, and more than once heaved a deep sigh.

"Don't wait for me to-night, Gerrie; I shall have a stroll, and probably be late. Mind you both get up when you are called."

He had risen from his seat, and was looking out of the window to observe the weather, which, with that variable caprice that characterises our insular climate, had changed from gloom to a brilliant autumn sunset.

"There will be a moon to-night, pa; but it rises late, and I shall be fast asleep, and miss the pleasant sight of it. Don't you like to go away?" she continued, linking her arm in his. "Let us stay on in dear old Broughton."

"Nonsense, goosie. We are not quite fixtures; but I feel rather out of sorts to-night. I am not so fond of change as I used to be. I sup-

pose nurse and you have wept copiously to-day over the parting?"

"Poor nurse!"

"Poor Gerrie! I'll wager you excelled in lamentation."

"And even you are sorry, papa, and so is Jessie. I really don't know what she will do when we are gone. Dr. and Mrs. Jewel are wretched, and Laura not back yet."

"They will be back next week, and Jessie loves pottering about among the schools and cottagers better than she loves you and me," replied the Squire, gloomily.

"Don't say that. Jessie loves us both I know."

"Now I am going, children. Be good friends, and don't forget any necessary items we ought to take with us. Ta, ta."

Gerrie lifted up her face to be kissed.

"Baby! It's too early for good night." But he kissed her, and putting his hand under her chin, looked at her with more tenderness than usual.

"You are not fretting for Regie, are you? He will keep——"

"No, papa, not exactly, but I shall love him always——"

"So you think now, of course. Where's Vernon?"

He had gone to his friends the stable boys, as soon as he heard his father say: "Ta, ta."

"See that he is in bed early, Gerrie."

And so the Squire quitted his daughter, leaving her still sad, and bearing in his own breast a heavy-laden heart, and a foreboding of coming ill that he could not shake off.

It never rains but it pours. So said many people of the village of Broughton, when the news spread far and wide that Squire Hoxton had gone out early the previous evening, having made all arrangements for a journey on the Continent, and had never been seen since. His bedroom gave evidence that it had not been occupied that night. Inquiries had been made in every quarter, and no tidings had been elicited.

Miss Gerrie was distracted with terror and

grief. She declared that her father had walked slowly down the avenue as if in profound thought, but that his last words were about the anticipated journey; surely that was certain evidence that he had not premeditated being delayed anywhere.

There were no tidings of poachers being abroad either, and no one could even surmise what had become of him.

Gerrie came, with her agony of suspense, to Jessie for comfort; but the only comfort she could gain there, was to witness in her friend a grief and terror that more than equalled her own.

"Oh, Gerrie, Gerrie, this is too awful. What can have happened? Let us go up the common, to Sister Grey. Have you seen her yet?"

"No, she was coming at ten o'clock, perhaps she will be at home now. Jessie, come with me. I have only you."

And they went together, scarcely exchanging a word till they reached the massive gates.

"Has papa come?" Gerrie inquired eagerly of the woman at the lodge.

"No, miss! not through this gate. But bless you, Miss Gerrie, there is no accounting for him.

Leastways, there never used to be. I'm now afraid he won't turn up again afore night."

Hundreds of times he had terrified his wife years back. Wolf had been cried too often in bygone days to cause any alarm to those who knew him well; but latterly he had been different, and it was unlike him ever to make an appointment for a journey, and not to keep to it.

The two girls entered the Hall together, and proceeded to visit all the Squire's haunts. They even searched the tall closets and cupboards, looked under the beds, and Gerrie kissed his top coat and sobbed over it.

"Oh, papa, do, *do* come back!" she cried, aloud.

But Jessie was dumb with unexpressed agony. She remembered his despondency, his cancelled threat, too, of self-destruction, and a dark, dreadful, ominous shadow of death seemed spread over everything, making even the brilliant morning sun appear to her but a black spot in the angry heavens.

The day wore on in dread uncertainty. The dinner hour passed unheeded. Jones fumed and fretted, and declared that no one need be alarmed.

Master knew how to take care of himself if anybody did. Kate Grey had appeared on the scene and vanished again. She had looked ashy pale, horrified. Her fears equalled those of Gerrie or Jessie, though she was resolutely reticent as to her own conjectures, and very soon they missed her. This, however, neither excited suspicion nor aroused concern. What had become of the Squire was the question of paramount importance.

All the afternoon the girls wandered about, dwelling mentally apart—each conning over and over again the last they had heard and seen of him, who had so mysteriously disappeared. Jones had driven over with his young master to all the neighbouring places making inquiries, but returned just as the sun was setting in the west in most brilliant clouds of rose colour and amber. He had absolutely heard nothing of his master. No one had seen him or heard of any one else having done so. No one had even noticed him sufficiently as he walked down the village in the early twilight, to be able to say in which direction he had gone, and he had taken no one into his confidence as to his destination.

As night advanced, the two girls sat hand in hand, straining to catch every sound. Time after time they jumped up in agonies of excitement, thinking they heard his well-known step. They were invariably disappointed.

At last the moon rose silently, casting its ghostly shadows on the well-kept lawn.

The Rector heard the tidings, and the mysterious event roused him out of the numbness of bereavement. He sent for the clerk, the schoolmaster, the sexton, one after another, to make inquiries. He sent messages to Jessie by no means to leave Geraldine. He sent for Mr. Roberts to come and consult with him, and Dr. Butt, and his solicitor. The commotion at the Rectory was equally ceaseless as that at the "Swan," only of a different degree.

Even Dickie opened his mouth wide to try and understand what had happened; and Mrs. Jewel came downstairs to see to his wants and hear the dreadful news.

At midnight, sleep fell on the inmates at the Rectory, while the girls at the Hall kept almost

speechless watch, each with imaginings they dared not express.

But night passed, and the early morning sun roused them out of fitful slumbers as they sat up in their chairs, harking for a step that might never again be heard, never, never more. Every time she woke Gerrie cried aloud: "Papa! papa!" but her voice died away through the open window, and there came no answer back as yet.

The village was all in commotion. First one rumour and then another was discussed without and within the public-houses. Nobody knew anything, but everybody longed to have something to impart.

Kate Grey had gone to London, having made an appointment that she said she would probably lose if she delayed. No one missed her much, and no one suspected her.

Perhaps the Squire had made away with himself, perhaps he had been spirited away by some enemy, perhaps had wilfully gone away in disguise to escape paying his debts. It was a well-known peculiarity of his to delay paying

these as long as possible. Probably he was run out, and had nothing to pay with.

Gerrie did not know; Jones did not know; but if he did not soon appear upon the scene, some one must search his papers and ascertain the state of his affairs, and learn if *they* would account for his disappearance.

Jessie felt as if this last blow was indeed a climax to all her troubles. After *this* horror, what could be too hard to bear? Oh how glad she was that their last words had been conciliatory—the only gladness she could ever know again on earth, unless he reappeared.

All day long the inns were again crowded, people coming in and out incessantly to hear if any tidings had been received. But the Squire's disappearance was almost too unaccountable for conjecture; it was of unprecedented mystery. Every one lived on wonder. Opinions, of course, were hazarded; but no good came of them. A single fact would have been worth a thousand ideas on the subject. The Hall kitchen was never clear of humble inquirers, and poor Jones was a most unenviable centre of attraction.

"Bless yer life, I know no more nor you!" was his invariable reply. "I only wish I did, for the sake of Miss Gerrie."

And well he might, for Gerrie looked fearfully ill. She had seen policemen in the garden, had heard of detectives being abroad, and dreaded some terrible discovery from hour to hour.

Jessie sent for Regie, who at once returned, or, no doubt, Gerrie's health would have given way. To cheer and comfort her he felt was his only duty. He could not give the remotest information as to the proceedings of the Squire on that mysterious night. He could only speak positively of his intention of going abroad.

When Jessie spoke of the Squire to others, she assumed an outward calm that astonished herself, for that night she often started up in an agony of grief, not unmixed with remorse and horror. But what could she have done more? And even now what ought she to do? Supposing she kept still the silence he demanded of her, Gerrie would be infamously robbed of her rights. Vernon, in the eyes of the law, was illegitimate, and could not claim a penny. Kate,

though she ought to have been Mrs. Hoxton, was no more Mrs. Hoxton than she was. Supposing she had urged this miserable marriage on the Squire, would he have listened to her? Most assuredly not; for he had declared that he would rather be hung than marry Kate. And as all he wanted was to make Jessie his wife, there was no possibility of making life endurable to him, unless he could learn to bow to destiny, which is God's will. He rebelled against God's will, however, and had gone, ah, whither! And yet he was a man of sense and strong determination. Such a man ought not, nay, could not have thrown a life away needed so much by a loving daughter, a hapless son, and many dependents. Surely it would indeed be selfishness in the extreme, as well as cowardice. No one could ever accuse the Squire of cowardice or inability to suffer.

One may lay down one's life for the good of one's friends, but not for their ill.

And Jessie could not believe the Squire guilty of such weakness. Nay, had he not promised for Gerrie's sake, as well as hers, to do nothing rash

or wicked? Surely he meant it; while he spoke, his voice, his looks, were unmistakably earnest. What then? Had he met with an accident? Had he, in his wanderings, fallen down some unused pit, or been foully murdered? Had he anywhere an enemy? But these questions had been conned over and over again by those much better able to solve them than she was, and yet three days had passed over their heads, and nothing been discovered.

CHAPTER VII.

All joy seemed to have gone out of the life at Hall and Rectory; the majesty and mystery of Death had swallowed up all minor interests.

Broughton—insignificant little Broughton—had become world-famous for a few short weeks. General excitement, however, had long since died out, while the dull pain left the chief sufferers with white faces and dark-rimmed eyes, from which gaiety and laughter had fled away.

Jessie spent two nights with Gerrie, at the express wish of her anxious aunt, after the Squire's mysterious disappearance. They slept together in a large spare bedroom, where old associations were less vivid than in Gerrie's own little room.

The third night was stormy and howling. They sat together over a low fire. They could

only hear the rain beating persistently against the old diamond panes, and gusts of wind tearing frantically round the corners of the house; and both thought, simultaneously, of the absent master, wondering whether he was safely housed in life, or if dead, whether his remains were underground, or exposed to the drenching rain and cruel storms. They shivered.

"Oh, Jessie. Where is he?" said his child, piteously. "If he is dead, of course it matters little where his body is, his soul alone is of any consequence. Jess, do you believe he is safe?"

"Yes, darling, safe in one of the many mansions."

"Oh! It is an awful mystery, Jessie. To think that after death our fate is unalterable. 'As the tree falls so must it lie.' Was papa a real believer? Was he ready to meet God?"

"I argue these questions continually," replied Jessie, "it is almost a wonder that people can think of anything else. Even clergymen nowadays teach there is no eternal punishment."

"Isn't that very, very wicked? Might we not say just as well that we don't believe the Bible, or that we believe in no eternity?"

"But, whatever your father thought, he said very little," said Jessie.

"Papa loved truth and honesty I know," said Gerrie, thoughtfully. "He loved you I believe, Jessie, because he thought you were real and earnest in acting up to what you believed. So you see, dear, it is quite certain that he really loved the good."

"If he did, and I agree with you that he did, he cannot be banished from God, who is the Supreme good."

They were difficult arguments that these two young ladies pondered over. It was a great comfort when they could come to the conclusion that, if dead, the loved and lost had reached the kingdom of Heaven, even though he were least of all among the throng.

The fire had burnt down, the coal-box was exhausted, the clock struck one from the old church tower, then the cuckoo-clock on the stairs, so they agreed it would be wisest to

creep into bed. They read their Bibles and knelt down in an old-fashioned way to say their prayers. They kissed each other, and for fear of disturbing the other, each pretended to be asleep, but they lay awake listening to the pattering rain, and the mournful sighing of the wind down the chimney, before gentle slumber stole upon them and soothed them off to dream-land.

The faint streaks of early dawn were just struggling through the window-blinds when Jessie was startled by a terrible scream.

"What's the matter, oh, what's the matter!" she cried, starting up.

"Jessie; oh, Jessie! Where am I?" It was Gerrie who spoke, raising herself as she did so and staring round the room with a terrified expression of countenance.

"Papa's found; oh, he is found, he's found!"

"Where, darling? You have been dreaming."

"Yes, I know, such a dream; oh, such a dream! All as real, as real as life. Jessie, I must get up, I must go and see if it's true. I have seen him, nothing could be more vivid, nothing more

awful. Come with me, we'll go together. My dream is true I tell you."

"But, my darling, it is scarcely light, and listen to the rain."

"It does not rain on him, I know, now."

Jessie was very much frightened at Gerrie's manner and incoherent words. Was her mind really giving way under the pressure put upon it? Had there ever been insanity in the family of either her father or mother? Perhaps so, and that might account for the Squire's disappearance.

"Lie down, Gerrie."

"I can't. I must go that terrible walk again I have never been since, never. I have hated to think of it. But my dream was life-like, Jessie. I heard that man's step again. Oh, horrible! horrible!"

She got out of bed and began dressing herself; Jessie had not the least power to prevent her, so she rang the bell at her head as loudly as possible to summon assistance. The younger servants were too sound asleep at that early hour to be so easily awakened; but Bolton started up in terror, and came at once, thinking the house

was on fire, and Jones was disturbed, and very grumblingly made ready to follow her.

He was very slow, however, in his motion, and was glad to hear Bolton pass his door back to her room.

"What's amiss, old girl?"

"Why, Miss Gerrie is losing her head, I believe. She is getting up, and declares she'll go out in rain and storm, to some queer place she's been a-dreaming her father's in. Miss Jessie can do note wi' her, nor me! I never seed her so defiant and set on onything in my life. You're the man to go with her, if go she will."

"Poor Miss Gerrie! it's been enough to turn her head. I'll go with her and set her mind at rest that it's all a delusion."

So saying, Jones hurried himself, for not for the world would he let any harm come to Miss Gerrie, whom he had loved and waited on from babyhood. If she *were* out of her mind, who had so good a right to look after her as he—bless her! Sane or insane, she should find how true the humblest friend can be. What did he

care for wind or rain, or whatever tempest that she dared face?

Jessie, too, of course, made ready to accompany the unhappy girl on what they considered her mad errand.

She had suddenly become speechless and unnoticing, as if acting in her sleep. She dressed herself with her usual care, wrapped herself up warmly; at any rate there was method in her madness, and when fully equipped, she looked at Jessie, who was following in her footsteps as rapidly as possible.

"Come along," she cried. "Anything will be better than this intolerable uncertainty. Anything, however awful. Don't talk, only follow me." She was unusually peremptory. She opened the door very cautiously, as if afraid of being intercepted. She trod softly along the dark corridor. Then she paused to listen, with Jessie close behind. Indeed, Jessie thought she was a somnambulist, and that it would be dangerous to rouse her; and hearing a step close upon them, she turned round and saw Jones. Raising her hand, she conveyed

to him the injunction to keep silence, and then the three reached the servants' hall.

Gerrie then observed Jones, and voicelessly motioned him to unbolt the door and unlock it. Jones obeyed, and the three passed out in the cold, rainy dawn.

Gerrie led the way, and walked rapidly.

"I have only seen the place once, except in my dreams," she said aloud, as soon as they had passed the gate and were on the road. There were several pitmen on their way to work, with sacks fastened over their shoulders to protect them from the weather, and with garters or straps over their trousers, just under their knees, for some unaccountable, but no doubt sensible reason.

The strange trio did not wish to be observed; but they heard voices behind also, and they could not make themselves invisible.

Jones stopped and let the men overtake him.

"It's Miss Gerrie. She fancies she has dreamt where the Squire lays. So, to set her at rest, me and Miss Jessie is going with her. Don't you let on, my man, and set the town a-talking.

Miss Gerrie is right enough in her mind as yet. But for how long is more nor we can say." Jones quite forgot his usual dignity, in his anxiety about Gerrie.

"A better young lady never lived," said one. "She ought to be took away from these parts, afore it's too late."

"So she ought."

The two girls kept in front, and the men followed some distance behind, till they reached the lodge gates. Then the colliers turned off, and Jones followed his charge.

"I never told you of my lonely walk to that place, Jessie, because I was bound under a promise not to do so. Never, *never* can I forget it. And in my dream I came again down here, but with Pattie, *not* with you; and the sun was shining, and the moon and the stars, but Pattie's face was brighter than all. It had the light of heaven on it, Jess, the light of heaven. She came to show me where papa lay. To set our minds at rest—yours, Regie's, and mine. That is what she said, precisely, over and over again."

"I hope she told you the truth, dear. But isn't it cold and wretched?" said shivering, faithless Jessie.

"Cold! I don't know. I feel neither the cold, the rain, nor the wind; I only want to reach that lonely cottage. Oh, I hope I shall not hear that heavy step, or see that terrible man in the bright-coloured slop. You never heard of him, Jess? He frightened me so. Nothing but *this* would take me there again. Jones!" she cried, turning round, "I am so very glad you have come. Keep close behind us, please." And she hurried on as if on wings.

They reached the bottom of the hill where the four lanes met, and Gerrie turned at once to the right. Jones knew now where she was going. He knew that old Rachel Rawson used to live up here; but it was some years since he had had a reason for visiting so uncanny a spot.

"I shouldn't wonder now!" he muttered. "Who'd 'a thought it?"

Suddenly Gerrie stood and hesitated. Her face was ashy pale; she trembled in every limb; she could not proceed.

"Jones! oh, Jones! How can we get in?"

"Where, Miss Gerrie?"

"There, in that cottage."

She covered her face with her hands a moment.

"We must go very, very softly. We might rouse some one who would prevent us finding out."

Jessie felt ready to faint, but refrained from speaking or crying. Daylight had come as much as it could through the leaden atmosphere. All was still as death, but for the falling raindrops and the moaning wind. They proceeded cautiously up the path that led to the back of the lonely dwelling. They did not wish to alarm the old woman. They reached the well—how well remembered by poor Gerrie—under the clump of old trees.

There was one window only on that side of the cottage, in which could be perceived a faint light as if from a rushlight.

"Now, what are we going to do?" asked Jones, in evident perplexity. "Whatever have you been a-dreaming of, Miss Gerrie?"

"That papa lies in that cottage. Pattie first

opened the door, and I saw him, white and ghastly, and I awoke."

"Well, then, we'll soon see," replied Jones, "and set your mind at rest about that, miss."

So saying, he proceeded round to the front of the hut, followed by the two girls, Gerrie nervous and terrified at her own temerity in making such an assertion.

"If I am wrong, Mrs. Rawson will forgive me because of my frightful anxiety; won't she, Jess?"

"Of course she will, darling, and if she does not it won't make much difference, so long as you are satisfied."

Both of them trembled with nervous apprehension, dreading the truth of the dream almost as much as its disappointment.

Jones having preceded them but a moment, they were surprised to find that he had at once entered the cottage. As they paused at the black-painted door, they heard him ejaculate the words, "My God!" His tone of voice denoted much; intense surprise, horror, anger — they knew not what.

Ready to faint, Gerrie entered the well-remembered apartments. It was little altered. A low fire was burning in the grate, and in the great four-posted bed lay the semi-idiot fast asleep. Gerrie sank on a chair, with a face of ashen hue, while Jessie put her arm round her neck, and drew her head so that it leant against her for support. The door leading into the back bedroom was closed; but they could hear loud whispers within.

"Papa is in there; I know it, Jessie."

And Jessie felt it was true; and had it not been for her beloved Gerrie, she would have rushed in to learn the truth, however awful it might be.

Every moment seemed to drag into interminable length; and when Jones appeared, his ghastly face did not reassure them.

"Oh, Jones, Jones!" cried both, simultaneously.

"Hush! for God's sake, don't disturb him."

Gerrie went off into a swoon, which alone prevented Jessie from doing the same.

With Jones's assistance, she got her on the bed, side by side with the coarse-featured

woman. There was no help for it, but it made Jessie shudder to see the contrast in such close proximity.

Jones hurried away, after fetching water from the sink-stone, and the poor woman awoke and began to rise in dismay, calling to her mother to come to their assistance. Mrs. Rawson appeared at once, in terrible agitation. She had aged greatly, her haggard face and white lips told a tale of suffering and care.

"Tell me, tell me, is the Squire in there?" asked Jessie.

"Yes, love, he is; and you may thank God that he still breathes."

Jessie's joy was almost overpowering. "He lives! he lives!" she cried, inwardly, with intense and joyful emotion, and unwonted strength seemed to return to her with redoubled vigour.

"Oh, Gerrie, Gerrie!" she whispered, loudly, hoping thereby to restore her friend to consciousness. "Your father lives, darling. Wake up and come with me to see him; he lives! he lives!"

But Gerrie made no response, and lay still,

in death-like torpor. The old woman at last flung water quite violently on to the ashen face.

She opened her eyes wearily, and seeing Jessie, closed them again immediately.

Again Jessie whispered the joyful news.

"Soon, dear, soon," answered Gerrie, as if quite incapable of realising the fact.

And Jessie longed to look once more on the face she now knew she loved dearer than any other on earth. In trepidation she approached the door; but the old woman hurried towards her, with entreating looks and raised hands.

"Nay, love, nay, you mont go in there; indeed, indeed, you mont. Wait a while, till your man comes back."

And Jessie returned to the bedside, full of sad forebodings.

"What were she dreaming on?" inquired Rachel.

"Don't talk to me, please; I, too, feel sick and ill."

"Surely, poor dear; but I'll set you boath a cup o' hot tea i' no time—fire's a-kindling foine.

She'll soon come round; don't you 'larm yoursen, miss."

So Jessie sat on and waited, listening to the crackling wood, holding Gerrie's cold hand, and unconsciously following the old woman as she made her preparations for hospitality. It seemed an interminably long time before Gerrie opened her eyes again. Fortunately they rested on Jessie's familiar form, so she closed them as if for sleep, and her face assumed a less ghastly hue.

But, oh, the joy to hear the carriage-wheels!

Jones did not come alone; John Roberts was with him, looking as ghostly and corpse-like as Gerrie herself.

He said not a word to Rachel Rawson, gave Jessie a brotherly kiss, and looked down on Gerrie.

What a change these three days' fears had made in her! It was scarcely credible; she looked years older, so pinched and careworn. He had heard Jones's tale, and was superstitiously inclined—a believer in dreams. Now, this being realised, intensified his awe. A deep silence

reigned in the tumble-down cottage. Old Rachel seemed petrified at the sight of John Roberts, and sat down with her back to everybody. All the rest stood by the side of the old four-posted bedstead, which could never before have held so fair a form. A cinder fell, and made them start as if a gun had gone off. Gerrie awoke, opened her eyes, and sat up.

"Oh, take me home—take me home!" she cried, wearily, and then was sobbing in Jessie's arms.

CHAPTER VIII.

As soon as Gerrie had sufficiently recovered consciousness to all that had happened that morning, she understood at once that her dream had been realised—that within that dilapidated cottage lay the father she had seen in her vision, uncertain whether she had seen him in life or in death.

It was untold relief to know that he lived, and that she would see his face and hear his voice so soon.

John Roberts peremptorily forbade her going into the back chamber; but seeing Jessie's determined countenance, he dared not stop her from entering, knowing that such opposition would be fruitless. Had not Jessie faced grim death in horrible forms at the pit's mouth? So she passed through the narrow doorway, and witnessed a scene—a transformation, of which, hitherto, she

had no conception. For a moment she felt stunned and sick. She paused to gain breath and nerve, then quietly approached a broken-down bedstead, upon which lay the figure of a man, with face so disfigured as to be almost unrecognisable. His eyes were black and swollen, the discoloration extending far below the cheek bone and across the brim of the nose, which feature was enlarged to most unnatural dimensions. The high forehead, with the wavy, iron-grey hair, was alone unchanged, and by that she knew her love—her late beloved master. She drew near, quite close, with bated breath; even so her heart beat, her temples throbbed with love unutterable. His long thin hand lay helplessly upon the patchwork quilt, she took it in her own, when he opened his eyes and gazed at her.

"Jessie, Jessie—oh, my darling!"

How she longed to fall on his neck, to press that dear hand to her lips! What was it to her that his face was changed? The voice was there, the tenderness that breathed the love that was inextinguishable, and to which her whole soul responded.

But with a mighty effort she controlled all passionate expression of emotion.

"How has this happened? Do tell me!" she said, no longer holding the hand, but being firmly held by it with a grasp at once both feeble and tenacious.

"Never ask me particulars, child, for all our sakes. Enough that I was attacked by a villain, and had to defend myself, but got the worst of it."

"Who was it? Where is he? Horrid wretch!" she cried.

"He has escaped beyond my reach," he replied. "But don't mention him to me again; and, Jessie, take care of Gerrie; don't let her see me while I am disfigured so. It would horrify her so. You have wonderful powers of endurance. Where did you get them? from neither father nor mother."

She did not answer; she did not want him to see how terribly she felt this new grief, for she was ashamed of feeling it so keenly after the agonising suspense of the last three days. It ought to have been rather a relief.

"Thank God you are restored to us, at any rate. We were beginning to fear we might never see you again."

"Would that be a great loss to you, Jessie?"

"It would indeed—terrible!" she answered, simply.

"Then I will try and get well—that assurance alone makes life worth living. Am I much altered, child?"

"You do look rather battered; but I should know you anywhere, even if you wore a mask."

"Is that why you stand so far away, because I am so hideous? If so, you will make it very hard for me to forgive that man."

"But I am not far away," she answered. "And you are just the same to me whether you are frightful or not. But I am quite sure you need medical assistance; your eyes ought to be bound up. May I send Dr. Butt?"

"Well, yes; I suppose he had better be let into the secret. I could not bear Gerrie to shrink from me in disgust, or her fastidious sweetheart, who shudders at ugliness. How did you find me, sprite?"

"Gerrie dreamt where you were."

"Gerrie did! Where is the child?"

"Here, in the next room."

"Then go away, Jessie, at once—don't delay a moment! Take her home, child, take her home. *She* must not know."

Jessie turned away. "Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, my brave little girl. Come again soon. I shall count the moments for you to come again. Give me your little hand."

She did, and he pressed it to his swollen lips. A moment later she was helping Gerrie into the brougham Jones had fetched from the Lodge to convey them home. John Roberts had contrived to make her understand that the sight of her would be injurious to her sick father and delay his recovery. Weak in body and exhausted in mind, the girl had unwillingly given in to his entreaties, and consented to return to the Hall without entering the sick-room.

Jessie spoke cheeringly of the bright prospect of the Squire's ultimate recovery, and thereby raised her spirits immensely. They were both awed, however, by the mysterious fulfilment of

Gerrie's dream. Surely it was a proof of spiritual communication with the unseen. They thought of Pattie as a kind of guardian angel possessed with spiritual power that raised her above them all.

Simultaneously the two girls relapsed into silence and thoughts of the life beyond, to which the Squire had been so near.

It was with solemnised faces they re-entered the Hall, though with hearts lightened from the weight of intense anxiety. Jessie thought of the wretched surroundings of the somewhat fastidious Squire; but she made no allusion to Gerrie of the terrible state in which she found him until closely questioned.

"Jessie, what can have happened to papa? I wonder if he, too, met and was robbed by that terrible man in the bright yellow slop! How altered Mrs. Rawson is—even her voice is changed. I do so want to see him. Is he hurt very much, or was it the shock? Such a shock as I had. I never can forget that."

"He must have been knocked down, for he is sadly bruised. Like you, he cannot bear to

speak about it, or to tell how it all happened. But, please God, he will soon be home again."

"How I long to see him," said Gerrie, dreamily, and then continued: "John Roberts is much nicer than he used to be. He is very much changed. Laura has turned him from the mere animal into a man. Don't you see the difference?"

"He does seem much more thoughtful. How tenderly he watched over you at the cottage."

"Yes, I almost like him now. But I can't forget the horror in Mrs. Rawson's face. She is like another woman. But, oh, isn't it a joy to know where papa is, and that he is safe now! And when he is able to be removed, we shall have him here again."

Jessie's heart gave a wicked throb of joy at the prospect, and immediately after she struggled with her emotion, and tried to feel less delight; for was not the Squire, in God's sight, the husband of Kate Grey, and had he not, by being her lover, forfeited all right even to her friendship?

No, no; that need not be. It is not what

a man has been, but what he *is*, that is of most consequence. He had gone wrong once; nay, who could tell how often! And yet his chance of turning back was not desperate. His life had been a long lie; but the terrible sin was not unrepented. It was not only repented, it was confessed. There was no secret now on his soul that was not shared by Jessie. And this made an inexplicable sympathy between them. For, whoever on earth he had deceived, to her he had been candid and true; had made no effort to palliate his evil-doing, and had deigned to ask her advice in his sore perplexity. This closed her heart against all harshness. She could be his friend, his *confidante;* she would help him to forget the bitter past, and to strive and agonise to do all that hitherto he had failed in. That should be her mission. His wife she could not be, nor could she be a stranger. She must continue to live in his presence, to see him almost daily, to share unuttered all his thoughts, to love him till death. For this was all inevitable, she could not betray a secret he was bound to guard for Gerrie's sake; she could not leave home; she could not

demand that he should go. Yet why should she fear? True love works only a purifying work; widens the heart's best sympathies, makes man or woman infinitely nobler than they ever could be without it. Even hopeless love, if unselfish, makes man not long to die, but to live a true life, a ceaseless battling with mortal wrongs.

The Squire was a proud man. Jessie could understand how bitterly he felt the degradation of being assaulted and overcome by a common poacher, whoever he might be. He felt it a kind of contamination from which nothing on earth could cleanse him. Had he left the miserable wretch half dead on the ground, there would have been no such proud, bitter reflection. Jessie did not sympathise with his proud consciousness of superiority over his less fortunate fellows—not for a moment; and she hoped that the kindness of the simple people, and his own utter helplessness, would help to eradicate it. What a pity, it seemed to her, as she thought of all the physical advantages Nature had endowed him with, that he had spent such a wasted life of idleness, impatience, and selfish-

ness! Oh, what might he not have been? Nothing but what he might yet become, after all.

Bolton, Jones, and nurse were full of conjectures when they spoke of these mysterious circumstances.

Miss Gerrie's dream was the talk of the village. That Pattie Atkins should have appeared to her to show where the Squire lay wounded, and almost at death's door, was indeed supernatural, and yet just what she ought to have done, if able. Jacob and his father were altogether confounded. What they thought about these inconceivably strange circumstances no one could find out, for they could not even express to each other what they felt or conjectured; and the grandmother, while the Squire lay in the cottage, avoided it as if it contained the plague. Nor was she any more communicative to her neighbours than were other members of the family. It made her ill to think about it all, she said. Believe in Pattie's appearance to her darling Miss Gerrie? Of course she did; and, after all, she had done her some good. Who could it have been who would have dared to attack

the Squire? and how could the Squire have wandered so far from the wood that Rachel Rawson could have found him? What did Rachel say for herself?

"And now, my dear sir, tell me how this happened."

It was Dr. Butt who was speaking, as he held the Squire's hand to feel his pulse.

"Go on with your examination, doctor. Let me know at once the extent of my injuries; never mind the rest."

"But, my dear sir——"

"Never mind buts. What is done can't be undone. Get me, as soon as you can, out of this cursed hovel—out of Broughton, until I am at least presentable to my daughter."

"But the brute ought, must be brought to justice. Did you recognise him?"

"The brute must *not* be brought to justice—understand that. I have confided so much to you, and you must make out the rest. He has escaped; he is not a Broughton man, and I do not choose to have my name dragged before the public. If you help to save me from that, you

make a friend of me for life; if you do otherwise, I will call in other medical aid, and we remain sworn foes. I am determined on that one thing."

Here was a mystery; but Dr. Butt was a wise man. He had been on friendly terms at the Hall ever since he had commenced practice forty years back; it was not likely that he would act now in opposition to his patient and friend.

"You may rely upon me," he replied. "Set your mind at rest, Squire. We must take care of Miss Gerrie, too, and not allow her to see you so long as your appearance might shock her. It seems to me you must have encountered old Nick himself in his midnight perambulations. But I am silenced; I will ask no questions, and, as far as I can, stop the mouths of others."

"Good. Do that, and you will earn my eternal gratitude. But it will be a long time before I am myself again. You must hush it up, and get me away—smuggle me from here somehow. John Roberts will help you."

"What does the old woman know?"

"Oh, she is safe—as safe as the grave—don't question her, don't even caution her. There is

one person I want to see, that is Miss Jewel. I can give her instructions respecting my daughter during my absence. Will you tell her to come, and to come secretly?"

This did not seem an unnatural request, and the doctor promised to do the Squire's bidding even in that matter.

CHAPTER IX.

Dr. Butt was a great favourite at Broughton, in Hall and cottage. He was a slightly built man, with white hair, a beardless face, and ruddy complexion. His eyes were blue and kind, and his manner always soothing. It was his habit to make his patients look ever on the bright side. He was far from strong himself; but he paid less attention to his own serious ailments than he did even to the fancied ones of those who consulted him.

Gerrie Hoxton was a particular favourite of his, so it caused no surprise to any one when he drove through the gates to inquire after her, before she had been many hours at the Hall.

The weather was still wretched, and he had been obliged to be burdened with an umbrella

in his open dog-cart, for he detested a brougham or any closed vehicle.

"Oh, dear doctor! how long will papa be before he comes home?" she inquired, eagerly.

"You must be patient, my child. He will be back in all good time; but I am going to take him to town for change of air, that will set him up better than anything."

"But he must get well first, mustn't he?"

"No, he must go to London in order to get well. He wants constant attention—such attention as no country practitioner could possibly give him."

"Is he so much injured?" asked Gerrie, the tears welling up into her beautiful eyes.

Jessie had gone to the Rectory to relieve anxiety there.

"Seriously; but time and care will soon restore him to you."

"How did it happen, dear doctor? *Do* tell me."

"That, my dear young lady, is impossible for me to do. You know I was not there to see, and your father probably had a fall which

stunned him, therefore his own recollections are but dim."

"Who could have done it?" she continued, anxiously.

"Oh, some blackguardly poacher, finding him abroad, thought he was good game."

"Has he been robbed? Is his watch safe?"

"I never inquired. All I thought about was his ribs and his limbs. Thank God, they are all sound. And now, my dear child, your father is most desirous that you should be patient and cheerful and trust in me. You know I shall give him all the care possible, and I assure you the idea of your worrying and questioning about him is the very worst thing he can trouble himself about. Now what shall I tell him about you to set his mind at rest?"

"Tell him! Oh, tell him that the joy of having found him is more than I can express; tell him I will be good and patient even while I count the days and hours for his return, and that I will ask no questions when he comes back, if he will only make haste."

"That's a brave girl. That news will satisfy

him. And now where is Miss Jessie? for I must be going, and I would like to see after her nerves."

"She has gone home. Shall I send for her?"

"No, no; I will call at the Rectory on my way back. I am a frequent visitor, I am sorry to say. I doubt if the old man will ever quite recover the shock of that terrible explosion. But there, dear Miss Gerrie, I am sorry to have reminded you of it. It was very thoughtless of me."

Gerrie recovered herself in a moment.

"Not at all, doctor; you are always kind. Good-bye. Give my best, *best* love to dear papa. Tell him I only want to see him."

The Squire's sister was in her room, and Gerrie thought it useless to let her know that the doctor was in the house, for she would be sure to ask questions innumerable, though he was a perfect stranger to her.

"I can tell auntie all I *know*, but not all I *think*," said Gerrie to herself, when she found that she was alone.

Jessie was explaining matters to her parents in the dining-room when Dr. Butt was announced. He was greeted as an old friend, and questioned with all the license possible by both the Rector and his wife.

But the doctor knew how to keep his own counsel without being in the least untruthful.

"It is a very shocking occurrence," said the Rector; "but the Squire, you know, has been somewhat hard on poachers, from the very first, and too ready to charge men with trespassing without any sound reason. By that means he has made enemies, so that I fear the fellow will get off; no one will denounce, but all will screen him, let him be who he may."

"Ah, well," replied the doctor, "I dare say it was a fair fight. Poachers are generally more or less pugilists, and the Squire, I suppose, had in his younger days acquired boxing as an art. I dare say the fellow got his deserts, if all were known."

"I am sure I most sincerely hope so, and if he has not, I trust he may do so ultimately. It is a most scandalous affair, that a gentleman should

be assaulted on his own land by one of these low savages."

"Poor fellow!" said the doctor, "they know no better. They are born in barbarism, and kept in it."

"That is just it," said Jessie, "it is the way they are treated that keeps them so degraded."

"Nonsense, my dear, nonsense!" said the Rector.

"Then, dear papa, what makes them differ from gentlemen?"

"Gentlemen," cried the doctor, "gentlemen! Why, my dear Miss Jessie, in what do they differ? There is no evil deed a gentleman is incapable of committing. The difference is merely between a good man and a bad man, and that is infinite."

"Right, sir, quite right," replied the Rector, with a sigh; and he continued, "I am sadly afraid the Squire himself has not been a good man."

Jessie felt her face burn with an unwilling blush. Ah, the poor dear Squire, good or bad, how he had crept into her heart, how it galled her to hear him spoken evil of! But she would

not venture to vindicate him, nor could she with justice. He had been a bad man, there was no gainsaying it; and yet he was dearer to her than could be the greatest saint. She deplored his wrong-doings as she knew he did himself.

The doctor's visit was not professional this time, though he made many kind inquiries. He had come to deliver the Squire's message to Jessie, and Jessie could see he wished to speak to her, so she accompanied him to the front door.

"The Squire wishes to consult with you about his daughter. How can you go?"

"Not secretly," she replied; "I shall tell my father. He will not object."

"But the Squire seems anxious no one should hear of your interview."

Jessie looked troubled.

"Will you ask him to trust in me?" she said. "Tell him I will be very prudent; but I could not go stealing up the lane alone. I hate mysteries, doctor, with a peculiar hatred."

"You are quite right; but in this affair the Squire is very reticent. Perhaps necessarily so."

"Then please tell him I will come. When would be the best time?"

"Well, I advise his immediate removal as a private patient to St. Thomas's Hospital, London, and shall accompany him there as soon as I think he could undertake the journey."

"Oh, no, no; not to a hospital, it is so public."

"So it is; you are quite right, and the case is peculiar. We must think of another plan."

"I will come to-morrow morning," said Jessie. "Good-bye."

The doctor shook hands warmly, raised his hat, and Jessie closed the door and crept up to her own room, to the very spot where she had learnt the Squire's guilt, and her own bitter disappointment. But all the wrathful indignation had died away. She had reasoned with herself and found endless excuses for him, because she loved him, and love covers a multitude of sins.

But she was not going to have any secret dealings with him. All she did should be open and above suspicion. She went direct to her

father's study, where he invariably secluded himself as soon as a visitor departed.

"Father!" She gave a gentle knock.

"Come in, my dear."

"I want to talk to you about the Squire and Gerrie."

"Well, I am sure I am very sorry for their troubles. Poor little Gerrie, it is hard lines for her for this to have happened. I only hope it will hasten her marriage with Regie."

Jessie did not answer, she could not just then echo the wish.

"Dr. Butt tells me the Squire wishes to see me alone, to consult with me about Gerrie."

"Ah! very likely it is about *that*. Go, by all means, my dear."

Jessie felt sure it was about no such thing. She felt a great desire to open her whole heart to her father, but hesitated. What was there to tell? How could she betray all the bitter secrets of *his* past? She had no right to do so. She might be as confiding as she pleased about her own concerns, her follies and failings; but she could not disclose his, however black, or

however deeply they affected her. It would be treason; for he had not meant to injure her, he had loved her truly, trusted her immeasurably, and she would be faithful.

"I suppose you are much distressed, my child, at these painful circumstances. It is quite natural."

"I am, indeed," she replied. Her lips trembled, her eyes filled, she could scarcely control herself.

"You are very fond of the Squire, Jessie. I hope he has not been acting any foolish part towards you, my dear."

"He has always been most kind," she replied.

"Nothing more, my dear; nothing more, eh?"

"There can never be anything but true friendship between us. But I——"

"Of course not. Very proper that you should be friends. We shall be all connected soon, so we must keep on these good terms. Don't delay, my dear, in going to the Squire, and learning his wishes. It is a very good connection for Reginald—very, indeed."

There was no more to say. There seemed no

call for further confessions. Even fathers are not better fathers when the weakness of the mortal nature of their children is revealed to them. Better not lay bare the heart to human ear. Put not your trust in man, applies even to wise men also. Never confess unless an object is to be gained, to be rectified, or an injury repaired.

Jessie kissed her father before she left him.

"Attend to Gerrie, my dear; poor girl. I would not have her neglected on any account."

It never entered his head to ask anybody to attend to Jessie. She had always been so independent, so self-reliant, it did not occur to him that she could ever need much consideration. So Jessie returned to the Hall, and spent the night with her friend, comforting and encouraging her to wait patiently her father's return.

And they both slept undisturbed, as she had not been able to do for the last three nights.

The night following, Jessie did not share her companion's slumbers, for her heart was heavily burdened with sorrows and perplexities she would feign hide from the Squire's young daughter.

She had been closeted some time with the

Squire that morning. He was dressed and sitting up in a rickety arm-chair in that poverty-stricken hut.

His features were gradually subsiding into their natural size; but the blackness of the eyes seemed worse than ever. He had evidently fallen heavily against some stone, for there was a nasty gash on one side of his head, that had been bound together by sticking-plaster.

He greeted Jessie gratefully, but with less demonstration than he had done latterly, and with even more respect. He marvelled at the calm confidence she manifested towards him, and would rather have died than broken her trust.

"How good of you to come," he said. "If I were in my condemned cell, you would be my Sister of Mercy."

"Indeed, I would," she replied. "And now please tell me what I can do for you—you know how gladly——"

"Yes, yes, I know. I know exactly what you would do, and what you would not. But I am not going to encroach on your generosity. I want to tell you exactly what I can remember

of this affair. That night I wandered out full of miserable thoughts. This is not the time or place to tell you what they were. Life seemed an intolerable burden, Jessie. I took no heed where my steps led me, and did not care how long I was out, or if I went to bed at all that night. I passed through Eastwood without meeting a soul, or hearing a human sound. It was evidently clear of poachers for once. Then I crossed a field and entered the top of the lane leading down to Van-dale. I remembered old Rachel Rawson's cottage. I knew she was Kate's aunt, and that she must have learnt our secret, though I had never communicated it to her. I had not the slightest intention of paying her a visit; but I wandered aimlessly on till I reached the street. The moon was shining brilliantly, and I saw a man dogging my steps. I did not feel in a fighting humour, nor did I care to be waylaid or robbed, so I turned towards the cottage, when the fellow made a sudden plunge forward, and cried out in coarse language to me to stop. I am no coward; I turned round and faced him,

and seeing who he was, I knew that I had no alternative. Jessie, that man considered I had injured him irreparably, and was determined on revenge. It went sorely against my grain to come into personal contact with such a low blackguard; but I was compelled to defend myself, and I confess it, I had no idea as to the result. The man was an ungainly, emaciated scarecrow, and I flattered myself that I should soon settle him; but he fought like a demon, and this is how it ended."

"Had you really injured him?" asked Jessie.

"Not intentionally; but he was the lover of that woman Grey, and imagined that I had gone to see her. No doubt he had been awaiting such an opportunity for years, and he did not fail to make use of it when it arrived. I believe he thought he had left me for dead. How he came upon me at such an hour was a mystery. I have a faint recollection of seeing Kate somewhere on the scene. Tell me, have you seen or heard of her since this occurred?"

"Yes, she came down one morning; the very

day we first missed you, and looked ghastly. She declared she must return to town, or she would lose her situation. Poor Kate!"

"Ah, well! She will congratulate herself on this."

"I don't believe it, sir. You are unjust to her."

"Am I? Perhaps so. But now you understand why I wish the whole affair to be commented upon as little as possible, don't you?"

"Yes; but, oh, dear Mr. Hoxton, do you think that man will ever attack you again? Your life is not safe while he is at large."

"No! I think he will collapse, after this excitement is over, into the meanest of cowards. Had I been in my usual spirits, he would have found his task more difficult. He has had his revenge now, and will avoid me, as a criminal would his judge. I need fear him no more than I ever have done. Indeed, I almost tingle to punish him."

"But you are not vindictive?" said Jessie, looking at him earnestly.

"No, no, child. Don't fear for me. All I

want is to hush up the disgraceful affair as much as possible, and you can help me."

"You know I will," she replied.

"Yes, I know you will. But don't grieve about me. Never mind me at all. I shall send for you and Gerrie to come to town, when I have recovered my beauty. Will you come?"

"Where to, sir?"

"To my sister's of course. You both need a change as much as I do, and you shall have it."

"Were you robbed? People are sure to make inquiries."

"Unfortunately, not. What shall I say?"

"The truth, of course. Lies always end in misery, and one gives birth to a score."

"Quite right, my wise little woman; but we are permitted, even by your code of morals, to conceal matters, I suppose."

"Certainly, and as long as we possibly can, if any good can come of it. But surely, that does not imply that we may perjure ourselves by deliberate lying. We are not so afraid of our fellow mortals as that."

"Afraid! I fear no man," replied the Squire, somewhat nettled; "but when I choose, I can refuse information point-blank, and I want you to do the same."

"So I will, when it concerns you."

"I feel quite safe with you, Jessie; but I am anxious to let you quite understand my wishes. See as much of Gerrie as you can. Tell her nothing of these matters. Talk of Regie, or anything else to distract her attention from me. I suppose I shall be obliged to consent to her marriage some of these days. But I intend you two to see a little of the world, as soon as I am presentable. Talk of a bright future, you two young things, and *I* shall be happy in seeing *you* so."

He assumed a tone of gaiety he little felt, and Jessie understood how bravely he was combating his own weakness. And so they parted.

CHAPTER X.

When John Roberts and his bride took up their residence in one wing of the Lodge, every one remarked on the change in the bridegroom. He looked the mere shadow of his former self—pale, thin, grave. Only his bride knew how abstracted he was when they were alone, how he dreaded their private interviews. She did not grieve over it at all. She was rather surprised to find him so different to all she had imagined him to be; so indifferent to amusement, to the pleasures of the table, so morose and uninteresting in general conversation. She was too practical to imagine a secret cause. Like all other men he had deceived her in trying to make himself agreeable before marriage. Was it not proverbial that lovers and husbands are never one and the same creature? She was not going to expect more from her

husband than the majority of ladies. He denied her nothing she particularly desired, and if not demonstrative in his affection, at present never quarrelled. But she often wearied of his idle listlessness. She had no idea he ever could have become such a dreamer. Was he contemplating becoming an author or a poet some day? She only annoyed him by making any personal remarks; so she wisely abstained from troubling herself much about him, and the sad and mysterious affairs that had visited Broughton during their short absence afforded ample subjects of conversation for months to come.

Especially this last concerning the Squire.

As soon as Miss Roberts had learnt the engagement between her ideal and Gerrie, she had found a companion, packed up her trunks, and gone to Italy. Laura was incessantly seeking Jessie's companionship, trying ineffectually to worm out of the unhappy girl how far the Squire had gone in his manifest admiration of her. Jessie maintained a rigid silence on that subject, and let every one surmise as much or as little as they pleased.

John Roberts had quite an exalted opinion of both Jessie and Gerrie. He was not disappointed in his wife; he had always been conscious of the notion she held of her own infallibility, and other people's absurdity or manifest inferiority. She had the wisdom of this world; her marriage had proved it. Jessie had wisdom of another impracticable kind; and no one knew in what martyrdom it might terminate.

Poor Arthur had been equally disinterested; and see how his unexampled waywardness had ended!

He had no doubt that Jessie, too, would do something outlandish, for she had none of the tastes of a young lady of modern times.

And what were Laura's tastes? What her aim in life? Her whole energies were devoted to making herself at ease—free from *ennui*, fatigue, and physical pain. For that end she dressed beautifully, ate and drank moderately, but luxuriously, drove in her carriage, or rode on horseback, read light literature, and kept a doctor in constant attendance for the slightest ailment or fancied ailment. She could not preserve her-

self from all mental worry, neither could any one do that for her. Thoughts would not all be drowned; memory could not be steeped in oblivion.

"Don't you regret that Arthur so madly sacrificed his life?" she asked of Jessie, one chilly evening in the late summer, as they sat before a cosy fire in the Lodge dining-room, a month after the terrible events recorded in our last chapter.

"Regret his irrevocable loss I do more and more," replied Jessie. "But he was not madly self-sacrificed. See how indefatigably others still follow his example! How much his influence has been felt! What exhaustive inquiries have been made as to the causes of colliery accidents, and the improvement in appearance, mind, and manners of the men engaged in such dangerous labour, especially all about this neighbourhood! I am convinced Arthur's death has been as beneficial as his life would have been, even to us who love him so."

"Ah, well! If he had lived, he would have done something else equally ruinous to all social

advancement. Do you think he would really have married that common girl?"

"I don't agree with your term, 'common.' Neither poverty nor ignorance necessarily makes one common."

"Pray, then, what, in your estimation, does make a common person?"

Jessie was silent.

"I don't mean in a religious sense of the word."

"Well, as far as that goes, it is, of course, quite common to be outwardly religious. It is far less common to be an atheist or an agnostic, without paying respect to any religious forms."

"But to return to Pattie Atkins. In what way was she uncommon?"

"She was remarkably beautiful, with the face of a Madonna. Indeed, I have never seen a picture with more perfect features, eyes, nose, mouth. You will grant that."

"Yes. As far as I remember, she was above the average in looks."

"Again, it was most unusual to see a girl

with such absolute unconsciousness of her own beauty, and so utterly indifferent to personal admiration — another peculiarity; and it is the peculiarities of an individual that make one a common or an uncommon character. Then did you ever hear of a poor girl absolutely refusing to marry a rich man, because she did not love him? There is not one in a thousand who would think of the man at all while he had such inducements to offer, not even among ladies."

"I often wonder who that man was," said Laura. "Of course, there are a good many rich young fellows within ten miles of Broughton. John has mentioned no end of names, all equally capable of making fools of themselves; but they have been too cautious to betray their folly. Have you an idea?"

"Not any more than you; Pattie never let a word escape her. Her father apparently dreaded to make inquiries, for which, I confess, I somewhat despise him. When I mention the subject, he looks grieved and sheepish, declaring his belief that it is best to let everything be buried with her."

"Of course, I don't agree with him. I think her character ought to be vindicated if possible."

"Atkins is no doubt in awe of the gentleman wooer; and after all, whoever he was, he evidently meant to make her his lawful wife. He could not do more."

"Perhaps not; but, at any rate, the dismal facts prove that Arthur loved no common character."

"Well, it is a queer case," said Laura, dubiously, "and you were all romantic together. I must congratulate myself on my own common-sense faculties."

"I am not quite sure that you are to be congratulated," replied Jessie. "I would rather lose my life, as our beloved brother did, in a noble cause, than let it rust in self-indulgence; for, after all, we wear out. Besides——"

"Now, don't moralise, Jess, or preach; both to me are downright detestable. To me it is the most horrible fact, that of Arthur's death, though it may have saved him from a still more horrible life, and Gerrie's aunt quite agrees with me."

Mrs. Campbell had come down to Broughton immediately after receiving intelligence of the Squire's disappearance, and had shared the terror and anxiety.

As soon as she was reassured concerning his safety she hastened back to town, and made preparations to receive him into her house.

> A brother's a brother till he gets him a wife,
> A sister's a sister all her life.

About a month later Reuben May was walking home from work with a very serious face.

He had undertaken a contract for a certain amount of work, and found that he had not made even sufficient money to pay the men he had employed. He had had a partner in the concern, who, discovering how matters stood, had backed out after demanding his own share, and left the neighbourhood.

Reuben felt himself bankrupt; but that the men should suffer was still more intolerable. He was cogitating all the way home how to manage. It was very different for men with families dependent upon them than for himself. Another thirty shillings would pay them, a mean sum

enough, but how to obtain it? He was willing to part with a valued possession, if he could only weather the storm and make a fresh start on Monday morning.

He was as active in Sunday-school and Temperance meetings as ever, and it had been urged upon him by many, even Reginald, to try and raise himself in the social scale as he was well able to do, by becoming a Scripture-reader or schoolmaster; but he declined. He was not and did not mean to be ashamed of his calling. Work did not make the man, but man the work. Besides, he could never feel more absorbingly interested in any other daily employment as that in which he had been reared. Every atom of information relating to iron was interesting to him, every individual who understood the subject, either theoretically or practically, was immediately akin to him.

There was, of course, much about his fellow workmen that revolted him and others of his stamp. Unfortunately, he found these latter few and far between, for Reuben was anything but a common man, even when dressed in hard

moleskin, and with face and hands black with smoke.

"Aye, lad, it's clean black," said his mother, "and soon comes off."

And yet Reuben knew that he was judged and valued in a measure, not for his own personal merits at all, but as one of a class who soiled their hands, and earned their living by manual labour. It is also taken for granted that men who do such things are fit for nothing else. There never was a greater mistake. But such manly labour must be done, and it is often the heroes who undertake, and bravely adhere to it. For who are the heroes but those, who, in the path of duty, brave difficulty and danger, and the scorn of man?

When he reached home that August afternoon, he walked into the houseplace, where the little family were assembled at dinner. His second brother had married and gone. The blind boy had drooped and died of general debility, to the untold grief of them all, for they had loved him best who was the continual call for self-sacrifice among them. Only James and

Harry remained; the former a clerk in the works, and the latter still a schoolboy.

"Our Reuben looks as black as thunder," said Harry to James.

"What's up, lad?" asked the father, as the eldest son moved about without speaking. "More wasters? Didn't I tell you you couldn't do 'em at the money? You wouldn't be said."

"It was scarcely enough; but then we've been unfortunate. Joe's made waster on waster, and the iron was not the right sort."

"What are you going to do?"

"Oh, weather the storm."

"Have you paid th' men?"

"Not quite. They are each four shillings short, and two lads eighteenpence. That makes thirty-one shillings—a big sum. But they are willing to wait."

"I'd none risk it, lad. Work by day. Piece-work's done, now."

"Piece-work is the only way of making money, anyhow, and I mean to stick to it when I've a chance. Next week I shall give it all out on piece. I shall have less wasters, I'll bet. Not

that one on 'em did it on purpose; but they will be more careful, and have learnt experience."

"Aye, one never knows how a carting 'll turn out till we've tried. But come, lad, draw up."

Reuben, having first washed himself in an outer building, did so, taking care to eat but little, which, however, his mother was quick to observe.

"Tha none going to let it tak thee appetite, lad, surely?"

"I'm doing well enough, mother," replied the young man. He was thinking of one or two of the men who worked for him who had large families. It grieved him that he had been unable to give them their full pay.

"Reuben, lad," said his mother, putting her head into his bedroom, where she heard him opening and shutting his drawers, "Reuben, I've got a bit laid by, you can have it if you've a mind to take it to Joe Sykes. I know they are very hard up."

"Are you sure you'll not want it?"

"Quite sure; not till Christmas."

Reuben's face brightened.

"It is not quite like robbing Peter to pay Paul," he said, laughing somewhat painfully; "because as yet we've all we want. But I will only borrow a sovereign, mother, not a penny more."

And then it was in his hand at once, for somehow or other Mrs. May was never without a little store somewhere laid up. Not many minutes later she heard Reuben coming down the tiny staircase whistling as usual, and happy she felt when he opened the door which led to it, and stood before her, dressed as neatly as the brother whose employment was so much more genteel.

He took down his round hat.

"Going to Lutterfield to-night?" she inquired.

"Yes, mother; it wouldn't be like Saturday night else."

"God bless the lad."

He smiled, "And you." He was gone, and she watched him walk down that lonely lane on to the common.

"There's not a better son living," she murmured.

And she was right. On reaching the lane end, he crossed the sparsely-covered green, and jumped a stile at a bound leading to another short lane, in which were situated four houses. At number three he knocked. A girl, with brilliant black eyes and hair, glittering white teeth, and rosy cheeks, appeared.

"Father in, Sarah?"

"No, he went out dreckly he'd had his dinner. Come in, can't you?"

He went in. What a scene! On a broken-down settle lay a lad, bearing a strong resemblance to the mother and the girl whom we have called Sarah.

"Why, Jonas! What's up wi' thee, lad?"

"Broke my leg; that's all! Didn't you hear?"

"Not a word. How did that happen?"

"It's a mercy he wasn't killed. Them as brought up him said as 'ow it were a mericle. A piece of coal fell on him bigger than himsen!" said his mother.

"You're not hurt anywhere else, I hope, lad."

"That's more nor any one can tell. I ache all over."

"Doctor said as how he warn't to talk, and 'll be off a month—fancy a month—and scarcely aught coming in!"

"How was it as how you couldn't pay his father up?"

"We've been very unfortunate. But I've come to see Tom."

"Well, it warn't his fault as he made wasters; yer know yoursen, them can't alays be avoided."

"No, no, I never thought such a thing, and I find I can pay in full."

"Pray yer, gie me what more you'ne got, for I don't know whativer I shall do now Jonas is off."

"They ought to allow him something till he is better."

"Ought! Wheniver will ought be considered? Niver i' this world, lad! He might lie there and starve. What would *they* care? He'll perhaps lose his job altogether through this misfortin'."

Reuben knew she spoke the truth; but made no remark. Putting his hand in his pocket, he

drew out the four shillings, and placed them on the table.

"I wish it was more, Mrs. Hawke," he said. "That is just what I still owe Tom." She snatched it up eagerly.

"We niver feared but what we'd get it," she replied. "We know as how you're honest."

Reuben turned to the unfortunate lad with the broken limb.

"Is there anything I can do to cheer you up a bit, Jonas?"

"Get me summat to read. There's note like it to pass time wi'."

"You're right there, poor old chap."

And his eye took in the dreary scene of untidy poverty by which he was surrounded—misery, that in the poorest hovel need never exist, if only the wretched inhabitants knew it.

"I've several places to go to, I can't stop," he said, refusing to be seated; "but I'll call in again soon. Good day, Mrs. Hawke."

"Good day, lad. It's well to be you."

Reuben only smiled in answer, and quitted the house; Sarah followed him.

"We ain't alays as bad as this," she said, apologetically; "Jonas being brought home like that, has made us all sixes and sevens."

The young girl admired Reuben. She met him at all the village gatherings, and a kind word or look from him acted on her like an inspiration. She was more like a beautiful gipsy than an English rustic, as were the whole family.

"Never mind me, Sarah," he replied. "It's nothing to me; but try and make the poor lad as comfortable as you can."

"He's as snappy as a bull-dog," she replied, "I wish he was like you."

"Oh, you must have a bit of patience with a fellow with broken bones. In his case I might be a deal snappier."

"Never, I'll back! Are you going to th' market?"

"I never miss," he replied. "And bring home mother's things for her as oft as not."

"Our Jonas wouldn't."

"That's because he isn't civilised enough yet."

"Get along—it's his pride."

"Pride of a wrong sort, then. Gentlemen always carry for the ladies."

"And I suppose you mean to be a gentleman?"

"In some things, yes—in others, never."

"My! you'll be in a tall hat soon, I reckon."

He laughed. "I'll hope not to be a fool under it, anyhow. But you go and cheer Jonas up."

"I'll tell un what you've said."

"You can. I don't want any secrets."

Sarah only wished he did. It was awfully aggravating that he never asked her to go with him anywhere. She knew there wasn't a better-looking girl in Broughton, except the young ladies; and none readier to be fond of him, or went to Sunday-school and church more regularly. Yet he never spoke to her a flattering word, never gave her one tender glance from those bright, dark eyes.

Folks said that Reuben May always declared he meant to be a bachelor, and work his way up to be a master; and no one had a doubt but that he would, for a steadier, more industrious, or more practical young fellow never was born.

He found Joe Sykes sitting at his door, with his little girl on his knee. She was just recovering from some low fever, and looked as fragile as a snowdrop. There was a well-kept garden in front of the cottage ablaze with brilliant colouring: many-coloured roses and marigolds, sunflowers, geraniums, verbenas — all kept in beautiful taste and order. The Saturday's cleaning had extended all down the flagged path, bordered by box from the door to the gate. The small latticed window panes were spotless, as was also the print curtain that hung on each side, while choice flowers took the place of the usual short window-curtain. Sykes' eldest son was under-gardener at the Lodge, and prided himself on his humble home imitations of grander things. The flag-stoned house was bright and clean, sprinkled with yellow sand. The man was washed, if not so well dressed as the young fellow who ventured on big jobs that a man with a family dare not risk.

With Joe Sykes Reuben left two other men's money, and then walked on to Lutterfield.

The smiles on his face died away, and an

expression of melancholy but not despondency settled on it.

It was still early in the afternoon as he crossed the meadows, and he walked slower and slower, more and more thoughtfully. He passed through a park-like field, with huge trees studded here and there, casting their heavy shadows up and down the undulating earth. Before crossing the turnstile, he threw himself on the ground under one of the tall trees, and stretched out his tall figure to its full length, face downwards. He was pondering, trying to map out a future career.

"Oh, Miss Jessie! Miss Jessie!" he cried aloud. "I can neither live nor die for you; but I've health and strength, plenty of work, the best of mothers, and *her* blessed smile to greet me Sunday after Sunday. Isn't that enough?"

Suddenly Reuben rose from his reclining posture, and paced slowly the side of the hawthorn hedge, heavily sprinkled with crimson pips. He was ruminating deeply, indignant at his own folly.

He laughed bitterly occasionally. He cut

himself a stout stick, peeled it and notched it mechanically, all the time resolving to overcome what he knew to be a senseless passion. He might just as soon fall desperately in love with the highest lady in the land as with Miss Jessie. Love her, indeed he did, he might, he would; but like the heroine of some book, some one far away out of his life.

Had he not almost vowed never to leave his own class; and would he like to see her come down to his level? No; his level had better be the grave. Sometimes, when he had seen her eyes brighten and her colour come and go, he had wildly imagined that she cared for him. "And she had far better die than do that," he soliloquised, "far better. See how unhappy Mr. Arthur became, after he began to think much of Pattie Atkins. The idea of it. The grief between *them*—and such as *we* are—is unbridgeable. I know it; I feel it; and I won't be a fool and waste my life over an impossible thing. If I could raise myself up to a good position, like Mr. Kent, and ride in my four-wheeler, it would be a different thing. But I promised Mr. Arthur

to travel third-class; and now I'll promise myself that for me his sister shall never leave the first, even if she would, which is not very likely."

"Mother," he said, when he was coming home from market with her, "I wish you'd get Sarah to help you a bit. You are not so young as you were, and there's a good deal to do."

Mrs. May gave him a quick side glance.

"What for, lad?"

"What I say; and besides, it would do Sarah good to be under you. Her mother seems to have no notion how to keep a house straight; and it's a bad bringing up for a girl, who, I know, has a rare good heart."

Mrs. May felt in an agony.

"You care note about that good-for-nothing lass, I should think."

"But I do. She is, I believe, true and very willing."

"She belongs to a bad lot."

"Not bad, poor and thriftless; but it is not her fault. The father is steady enough, and Jonas is a rare good scholar."

"I'll never believe you care for *her*, any how."

For his mother had long guessed his secret.

"I have seen her to-day, and she has pleased me a good deal. But don't be frightened. I'm not going to marry her straight off; perhaps not at all, if you can't like her. But, mother, I wish you would have her here. It would do her good, and me no harm. If there is anything amiss with her that cannot be mended, you may be sure I shan't want her company all my life."

Mrs. May was puzzled. She had never refused the very few requests her son had ever made.

"Very well, Reuben; you know your own concerns. You'll be five-and-twenty years of age soon, and she is nobbut a lass; but you're old enough to choose for yoursen, without our interference."

"It's only for my sake you bother yourself, I know," replied her son; "and you've been such a mother, I am afraid you have spoilt me for any wife," he added, with more tenderness than was his wont.

"At any rate, you're too good for such as she for a wife!"

"Haven't I heard you say, many a time, that if we pleased God, and pleased ourselves, when we married, we should please you, too?"

"True; but I don't believe you are pleasing yourself."

"I'll promise you I won't marry unless I do."

"Promise you won't marry her if you love some one else better," said Mrs. May, eagerly.

"That depends upon what you call better. In one sense I shall never love any one as I love you. No woman alive."

"Nor as you love Miss Jessie?"

Reuben went red and then pale. He did not answer at first.

"I am thinking very differently of Miss Jessie than I have done; more worthily, mother, more as I should do. Don't fret about me; I am all right, and shall be."

"Ah, my lad, have you heard as how she is going to be married?"

"Not a word. I don't think she ever will marry. But, married or single, to me she is the best friend I shall ever know—never, *never*

anything else, even in thought. Are you satisfied?"

"Aye, lad. Only be happy."

"You'll send for Sarah next Saturday?"

"Yes. I know but little about her, however. Anything to please thee."

So, the Saturday following, Sarah Hawke came, blushing and proud, to help Mrs. May do her cleaning, who was too just to show the girl that she did not want her. Reuben looked approvingly at her bright, clean appearance when he came home, and thought to himself that he would rather raise another to his level than step up higher himself. Sarah went home highly elated, her heart palpitating joyously at Reuben's kind words and looks.

CHAPTER XI.

Meanwhile Jessie and Gerrie passed their time much as usual. Mrs. Campbell, on returning to her residence in town, had promised her niece a happy time when she brought her friend to Weymouth Street during the winter season.

Jessie was sometimes quite ashamed of her continued infatuation respecting the Squire. Occasionally the horrible idea seized her that he was the man who lured Pattie to London, and pretended he wanted to marry her. If he could act so towards one, why should he scruple about another? And yet Pattie knew him too well, surely, to be thus beguiled!

A moment after she would be enraged with herself for doubting him. It may be cruel, but it is a fact, that when we find a person once

deceptive, we never can *completely* trust him again. She blamed herself that she could not always think of him at his best, now he was absent and disappointed.

News had been received from Reginald of a contemplated change of labour. He wanted more work, he said, and had been offered a curacy in a densely-populated South London district. He wanted to know what Gerrie thought about it, and she told him candidly that she hoped he would be where he was most useful. So to London he went, where he put heart and soul into the work he loved.

He never forgot his first drive on the top of a tram, along a dreary road, from Wandsworth to the Borough. He went on purpose for observation. The bearish manners of the poorer classes struck him as being almost singular. They allowed women, old or young, to stand up while they remained sitting with the greatest unconcern—even women grey with age, or those with babies in their arms.

One man, when asked to perform some slight office for another, demanded "What he would give

him for it, as he did not reckon to work for nothing?"

Such uncourteous manners, even among those lowest in our social scale, seemed unaccountable in the most civilised city in the world. Surely, thought Reginald, there are still savage Britons abroad, and there ought not to be. He looked behind him and before, to the right, and to the left, as he went along, and marvelled at the accumulation of tenements for the housing of the atoms of humanity, fast becoming almost impregnable in their vastness.

The cry of the day was then and is still how to reach the masses of our population, and Reginald pondered what to do with them when reached.

His parish was situated in a densely-populated neighbourhood, and there he determined to use all his energies, his attainments, his means for the good of his people.

Endless were the philanthropical and religious schemes that crowded upon his brain, through newspapers, pamphlets, public meetings, and association with his fellow clergy, yet the lot of the million still seemed irremediable; but he

found on coming into closer contact with them that there was much less misery than one might suppose, and immense capabilities of enjoyment.

The interminable streets of monotonous-looking dwellings contain men and women with precisely the same feelings and capacities as the higher classes, capable of the same enjoyments, suffering the same pangs.

The residences of the clergy are veritable oases in these deserts, surrounded by a bit of green, and with bright appearances of prosperity. And these clergy, exceptionally housed, delicately clad, and comfortably fed, are most of them really leading lives of some self-sacrifice.

It is hard, however, for the toiling millions around them to realise this. The mere fact of existing at all amidst such surrounding, is of itself no doubt a trial to the fastidious.

Reginald could not bear to think that there was a necessity to employ men of a lower social status to enter abodes he would shrink from, for he had long resolved to find nothing too hard for him.

It is impossible for a clergyman to lose caste

in following his holy calling; he never soars higher than when he stoops his very lowest to do noble deeds. So it ought to be with every Christian; and surely if every one would but do their part, the world itself might be moved. Reginald tried to impress his humbler friends with a sense of the vastness of their own minds, and that supreme gifts are bestowed upon the tenant of an obscure attic, or that of a palace, with much impartiality by the Giver. And, after all, mental distinctions are far more important than those of wealth. To what heights might the poorest not aspire, to what depths might not the richest descend?

Yes, he would teach his people to use this all-powerful thinking apparatus; teach them to recognise all their advantages. All the beautiful sights of London that attract nations from afar are *theirs;* and yet, to many residents, are as unfamiliar as to the aborigines of Australia.

One afternoon a week he devoted to the work of introducing the wonders of London to some of the parishioners.

Recreation, and an introduction to art and beauty, he considered as essential to human

advancement as eating or drinking. There was little to condemn in what they met. Theatres, card-playing, concerts, circuses, exhibitions, museums, dancing, dinner-parties, novel-reading, might be productive of good only, enjoyed with moderation; and surely in the wondrous paintings and sculpture, the architecture and the antiquities of Modern Babylon, endless interest and instruction may be extracted. Everywhere if we seek evil we may find it. We fear it is not banished from our churches and chapels, our prayer-meetings, Dorcas meetings, mothers' or temperance meetings. No; everywhere evil is mixed up with good, and it is hard sometimes to discriminate between the two.

But to return to our story.

There was now an acknowledged engagement between Reginald and Gerrie, and they corresponded with great regularity. The Squire was under medical care at his sister's residence till quite mid-winter, when his countenance resumed its normal condition.

Old Rachel Rawson had become slightly paralysed, therefore she and her imbecile daughter

were received permanently into Lutterfield workhouse, where Dr. Butt visited them from time to time. Their cottage, before they left, had become uninhabitable, and remained from henceforth untenanted.

Of Kate Grey no tidings were received, no application was made for pecuniary assistance, even to those from whom she had a right to expect it.

Bolton and nurse remained with Miss Gerrie at the Hall, who was by no means left solitary during her father's and Vernon's absence.

And it was not gloomy hospitality that Gerrie offered to her friends, who, after the nine days' wonder concerning the Squire's misadventure, made no further reference to the subject they knew must be painful to their bright young hostess.

Gerrie knew from experience, young as she was, that too much solitude is not beneficial; so she invited her friends and relatives to the Hall, and paid them return visits. With Jessie she went among the villagers, chatting with them pleasantly, or sympathising with their troubles

and sorrows, helping them in word and deed. They soon looked upon her as their kindest friend, and learnt to speak well of the Squire for his daughter's sake. Both Jessie and Geraldine improved vastly in appearance during this season of tranquillity, looking forward to their London visit with eager longings, when they should meet lover and father, brother and friend. And the long hoped for dream became a reality.

Jessie had received a direct invitation from Mrs. Campbell to accompany Gerrie to London the month before Christmas, for at that festive season every one likes to be at home.

Both Dr. and Mrs. Jewel were highly gratified at this mark of appreciation of their daughter's worth, and willingly consented to spare her for that brief term, though they hardly knew what would become of the poor people without either of their two friends.

Mrs. Jewel became astonished at her own reawakened interest in parochial affairs. She seemed to have returned to her honeymoon, when she had formed so many beautiful schemes for acting the clergyman's wife, and of superintending

all the concerns of her husband's flock. But she had found the poor creatures so uncomeatable, that she had resigned all her hopes of doing good to them, and when Regie appeared, new and closer interests swallowed up all lesser ones, and the villagers were neither the better nor the worse for her existence in their midst.

No sooner had the girls really gone, than Mrs. Jewel found herself called upon to listen to the endless inevitable troubles of her poorer neighbours, and she was astonished to find what an interest was aroused about their concerns in her naturally self-contained mind.

"We really cannot help chronic cases," said the Rector; but Mrs. Jewel agreed with her daughter that incurable cases were the saddest of all, and to ameliorate, if by sympathy and kind attentions only, is always possible.

There was old Mrs. Atkins, so depressed in spirits as to be threatened with hopeless melancholia. It did her a world of good to be visited and talked to, and Mrs. Jewel took her own hopeless sorrow in the shape of poor Dick, and sat in the humble cottage, to cheer the solitary

inmate. It did the fast-aging woman good to speak of her lost son, it relieved her to talk of him as the bonny lad she had loved, and for whom she had sacrificed so much, and when Mrs. Jewel told her never to cease to pray for him, the words brought her some indefinable comfort, that she could never explain.

And of Pattie, her sayings and doings from infancy to the grave, she was never weary of speaking. Her hearers forgave the now feeble old woman, when she repeated herself over and over again, each time exaggerating in her loving imagination all the tender memories of her poor grandchild. Those who listened most patiently cheered her most.

Mrs. Jewel begged her to come to the meetings of the mothers, but she shook her head.

"Nay, ma'am, nay; they akses so many questions. They are not like you; they don't let me talk my own gait. They hurren me on, and wants to know too much. I'm best i' t' house; and when people's minds are oppressed with secrets others long to learn, they *are* safest within their own four walls."

From Mrs. Atkins, Mrs. Jewel went to Mrs. May, whom she found, as usual, as clean as a new pin. She was one who had everything in its place and a place for everything. Yet she dusted the dustless chair for the Rector's lady, and felt herself highly honoured to entertain such a visitor.

Dick nursed the cat, as there was nothing else for him to do. Mrs. May was another woman who rarely attended meetings of any kind. She was fond of reading, otherwise wholly absorbed in her household duties.

"How is your son, Reuben? He must be a great comfort to you," said Mrs. Jewel.

"He has been, indeed; but I am a bit troubled with him just now, for I fear me he is thinking of getting married, and I think he might have looked higher than he has."

She was alarmed lest the inmates at the Rectory would think he would demean himself by so doing as much as she did.

"Indeed! I hope he is, at least, going to marry a girl who is both respectable and a churchgoer."

"She is a churchgoer right enough; but she does not come of a respectable lot. Their house is oftener like a pig-sty than a human dwelling. You know Sarah Hawke, ma'am?"

"Of course I do—a very handsome girl, and, as far as I know, quite steady. Her mother being shiftless, and her father rather given to drink, need not necessarily make Sarah disreputable."

"But then think what a bringing-up she's had."

"Poor girl; that is not her fault. I have always taken much interest in what my daughter has told me of Sarah. I know she likes her very much, and has great hopes of her; but is she not rather young for Reuben?"

"He is five-and-twenty, and she but nineteen; but he isn't going to be married yet awhile, but I fear me he is contemplating keeping company with this girl, and it puts me about, ma'am, because of her belongings."

Mrs. Jewel could have spoken of her own anxieties about her children, but preferred to keep a dignified reticence on all her own affairs, as ladies always do, while they worm out every-

thing from their inferiors. Mrs. Jewel, however, refrained from asking impertinent questions, which we hope other ladies may some day learn to do when they are occupied in trying to reach the masses. If they did, they would succeed in their mission much sooner, we fancy. To be sympathetic is quite another thing from being inquisitive.

After a little more conversation, Mrs. Jewel determined to call on the gardener's wife, and learn how Atkins was, and if they would allude to the Squire's accident on his return.

But Mrs. Atkins, junior, in no way satisfied her curiosity, and Mrs. Jewel, without exhibiting inquisitiveness, felt quite mystified, as she invariably did, when she thought of the subject. She returned home to tea feeling very much less *ennuied* than usual, and she and her husband talked quite pleasantly over the concerns of their flock with mutual interest.

Finding herself in real requisition decidedly brightened up the elderly matron, who, from a mere delicate, high-minded woman, became once

more active and energetic, thereby shaming her husband out of his den, and helping him to do his part in lessening the burdens of others more heavily weighted than himself.

CHAPTER XII.

"WELL, old man, and how are you getting along?"

It was Reuben who spoke, having hurried up hill to overtake his old friend, Jacob Atkins, as both were returning from Lutterfield market one Saturday evening in the late autumn.

Jacob was two or three years younger than Reuben and was far less practical.

For years he had habitually worn a somewhat sad look on his face. He could not throw off his sorrows, they clung to him. Mr. Arthur, whom he nearly worshipped, he never forgot, and poor Pattie's tragic death was constantly on his mind. He studied harder than ever, dressed like a gentleman; but no worldly success could obliterate the bitterness of the past.

He gave a start on hearing Reuben's hearty greeting, turned round, and shook hands warmly.

"I say, Jacob, what have you been doing with yourself? Shake it off, man, shake it off."

For Reuben was quite struck with the expression of Jacob's face, so hopelessly melancholy, with those dark, dreamy eyes that reminded him so much of Pattie, and his pale, sallow complexion telling of more than study.

"No use, lad," replied Jacob, looking down, "only books make me forget."

"But if you overdo it, you will lose your health. What then?"

"What then? Why die, to be sure, and what is death after all but a new birth in a higher state? I wish to heaven I had not long to wait. What is there to live for?"

"To work, if nothing else," replied Reuben. "As long as the Almighty finds one something to do, it is worth living to do it."

"But any one else could do it."

"Don't you believe it. A master knows the job that will best suit the man, and the Almighty knows a bit better than he. Don't be in a hurry,

you'll be sent for when you are wanted elsewhere."

"That's a good idea, Reuben, worth turning into poetry."

"Well," replied Reuben, "it is; no one can make better verses than you, so I am right glad to have found you another job."

"I believe you could do it as well yourself. Why don't you try?"

Reuben laughed.

"Nay, lad; what I say I like to be short and sharp. I can't stand too much of ever such a good thing."

"And I like drawing a thing out to make the very most of it. But there, don't talk about me, I have no patience with myself. I hear you're a-courting Sarah Hawke, but I can't believe it."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know, I always fancied you'd 'a looked higher."

Reuben was silent.

"I thought you would be sure to rise in the

world, and such a wife as she is will drag you down."

"I'll take good care she doesn't," said Reuben, "I'll lift her up."

"How can you? It isn't in her."

Again Reuben laughed.

"Well, I'm glad you don't know her as well as I do. There's a good deal in her, I can tell you, though she is not a lady." Then he paused a moment.

"I always thought——" Jacob began.

"Stop!" cried Reuben, "I will tell you what you thought. You had a notion that there was no one I cared for but Miss Jessie, and you weren't far wrong. But, Jacob, I promised him who is gone up higher that I would travel third-class down here, and try to raise my fellow passengers a bit. I mean to keep my word, lad, to the letter."

Jacob was thoughtful and puzzled.

"But you would not marry even a poor girl and love another better, would you? I couldn't."

"Looking at it in one way, it don't seem

right; looking at it in another, it does. And it is more sensible to look at it in a common-sense point of view. When one meets a queen among women, men cannot but love her. Why, all the crowds of London would die, to a man almost, for the Princess. They all love her. In that way I love Miss Jessie; but as a kind of princess, you understand, far above me."

"You are not in love with her, lad, and a good job for you; if you were, you couldn't marry another woman. There is only one face I care for on earth. I can't think of another, and I'd sooner die than not be free to love her while I've breath. I'm a fool. Verse-makers are fools, yet they have their consolation. Even I have mine, when things look blackest. I'm like our Pattie; I can die, but I couldn't marry one I couldn't abide."

"But, Jacob, lad, that's not my case. I *can* abide Sarah; I like her company. You mustn't think that I would be such an ass as to marry her if I couldn't abide her. But I'm not married yet, nor likely to be yet awhile."

"When you are I'll wish you the best of luck,

old chap. We've been friends many a long year."

"Yes, and are likely to be a good many years to come. Cheer up, Jacob, and think as little as you can of a face as is another man's."

"The remembrance of her will hover round my death-bed," replied Jacob. "I could no more love another than I could change the colour of my hair. I don't want to. But hold your noise about it—don't let's even talk of it again. It can do no good."

"You're safe with me," replied Reuben, "and there'll maybe come a time when she will know."

"Yes, but beyond the grave, lad."

There was a solemn silence between them. Reuben, though he had, with his masterful will, overcome his infatuation, could well sympathise with Jacob's determination not even to try, and, contradicting himself, admired him for it.

"Do you know when the marriage is to come off?" asked Jacob.

"Well! my aunt Bolton expects that when they all come back for Christmas the date will be fixed. Mr. Regie is sure to have a living afore long."

"He's almost as good as Mr. Arthur," said Jacob, "not quite."

When our two young heroines arrived at the Euston Station, they were met by the Squire and his future son-in-law.

Gerrie nearly sprang into her father's arms, eagerly scanning his face to see if he looked the same, and was satisfied that the change was, if anything, an improvement, for there was no mistake in his tenderness for her, in the expression of his dear blue eyes, that looked still more beautiful by the darkened rims round them. His beard was now allowed to grow, quite concealing his lower features, and his hair was almost white, but she thought, and truly, that whatever alterations there were in his person they did but add to his distinguished appearance. After the first loving greeting she turned to Regie, who took no undue advantage of the rights of an accepted suitor. He grasped her hand and held it till he placed it on his arm to lead her to the cab which was to convey them to Weymouth Street, while the Squire turned to Jessie, who had quite mastered her own emotion

at seeing him again, while chatting with her brother.

"You look quite yourself again, sir," she said, joyfully.

"No, no; I'm aged horribly. Don't flatter me, child."

Gerrie was walking on in front with her lover, and Jessie did not envy her; but she wondered what the Squire would do in the gloomy old Hall, without his little daughter, once so neglected, now the pride and darling of his home.

But Jessie was not going to cast any shadows before her. She was at her happiest and best—bright, fascinating, and even merry, and felt quite justified in complimenting her friend.

Her bright glances, her manifest interest in him and his, her youthful vivacity charmed him out of his grimness, and he determined wisely to enjoy her society, without giving her the slightest intimation of his unchangeable attachment; fearing he should make her less natural in her manner towards him, and so become conscious of her own answering affection.

They found Mrs. Campbell in her finest humour. The house was for once full of life, of talk, music, and poetry, in spite of the gloomy street in which it was situated. The girls were conducted to every place of interest in the day-time, on foot if fine, and in various conveyances in murky or rainy weather. The hours seemed to fly. Everything delighted them, for they saw London at its richest side, and were not introduced at first to the dark, poverty-stricken quarters.

In the evening they were taken to concerts and theatres, or to dinner-parties, unless one was given in their honour by Mrs. Campbell herself.

One evening they were going to the theatre, and a cab was sent for. Both girls were delighted by the admiration, the friendship, and gaiety of their new life, and came running down-stairs, wrapped in their opera cloaks, the very picture of joy and happiness. The front door was wide open, and the butler awaited the young ladies, to assist them into the cab, when the Squire came out of the door, followed slowly

by Reginald, who was trying to combat Mrs. Campbell's prejudice against such places of amusement.

The Squire went and stood on the steps; suddenly, every one heard a loud exclamation from a deep bass voice, followed by another from the Squire, who hastily receded into the hall, with a face as white as ashes.

"Good heavens!" he cried, and leant back against the wall.

"Oh! papa dear, what is the matter?" cried Gerrie, terrified by his look.

"Where's Reginald?" he gasped.

"Here I am. Who wants me?" cried the younger man.

"No, no, I want Jessie. I want to speak to her."

He seemed dazed.

"Send the man away," he added, turning to the butler.

"He's gone, sir."

"Stop—go after him—quick; find out his name and where he lives."

Jessie had drawn near, and, utterly regard-

less of what construction might be placed upon his proceeding, he ushered her into the dimly-lighted library.

"Jessie, that man was my assailant."

"What man, sir?"

"The cabman. Goodness me! Where can he have sprung from? I didn't hurt him much, evidently."

Jessie was not sorry for that, but she was anxious to know what the Squire wanted her to do.

"You don't want to punish him, do you?" she asked.

"No, no. I want to hear of Kate. She may be starving. Will you go and see him for me, if we find out his whereabouts?"

"Certainly. But, dear Mr. Hoxton, don't alarm Gerrie."

"Send for another cab and let us go to the Lyceum. Never mind this man, do let us go," she continued.

"As you like. But you will not tell any one.

"Not for the world, if you tell me not."

"My brave little girl. Take my hand; some

strengthening influence steals out of your veins into mine, and makes a new man of me. Come along."

He had her little hand in his, which was cold as marble. He lifted it to his lips, and she did not find it hard to forgive him for it; nay, she rather felt inclined to do the same to his dear worn hand. But she refrained, conquered her tears, and cleared her voice.

"Come along; we will forget everything but Henry Irving, and if he makes us do that, we shall owe him some gratitude, eh?"

"Endless!" replied the Squire, as they entered the hall, where all were assembled in utter amazement, except the butler, who had gone on his errand, and had not returned.

"We shall be late. Regie, fetch another cab," said Jessie.

"Then you are going, after all?"

"Of course."

"Put on your coat," cried Gerrie, always thoughtful.

Being in evening-dress, Regie did so, and was back in a very few moments, when the four

drove off, leaving the lonely lady much mystified at her brother's extraordinary conduct.

He sat back in the cab and was absorbed in his own reflections, whilst Jessie began quite vehemently to defend theatres and theatre-goers.

"It is no more loving the world and the things that are in the world, than to enjoy a concert, or a walk, or the museums. The theatre is no more the world than Regent Street, and I don't love one or the other. I may love the actors and actresses—I don't love bricks and mortar."

"Of course actors and actresses are our neighbours as well as other people, only apparently much pleasanter than some," said Gerrie, "though I don't know why they should be."

"We love what is good in people," said Reginald, "and the wonderful gifts with which they are endowed."

"At the same time," said Jessie, "I would rather hear a very eloquent preacher, they touch your heart more."

"So would I," said the Squire, "especially

when the preacher is a dear little girl who understands her subject."

They all laughed, and conversation became general after the Squire had entered into it.

Not a word was mentioned about the incident of the cabman who had decamped. Reginald and Gerrie understood perfectly well that they were not to know anything about it, so wisely refrained from questions.

They enjoyed a delightful evening, though occasionally the Squire exhibited absence of mind, and Jessie cast anxious looks towards him, which more than once he answered by a reassuring smile that, disguise it as he might, had much affection in it.

CHAPTER XIII.

The butler returned with the tidings that the cabman's number was 5,016, that his name was Joe, and that he lodged with another cabman who was off the stand. But the man who gave this information promised to find out his address for the following morning.

Mrs. Campbell was sleepless from curiosity. She called Jessie into her bedroom to question her in the forenoon; but Jessie was equal to the occasion.

"The cabman must have been an acquaintance of the Squire's," she said, "and evidently avoided being recognised. But what did my brother want with you, my dear?"

"Though so young, the Squire has trusted me with his confidence, dear Mrs. Campbell, and has commissioned me to do a trifling errand

for him this morning. Had he wished me to disclose it, he would have spoken openly."

"But it was so very peculiar of him," said the lady, evidently annoyed.

Jessie was quick and impulsive, and by no means inclined to tolerate suspicions upon her behaviour.

"Will you kindly speak to the Squire on the subject?" she said. "I do not feel justified in criticising his conduct."

"You! Of course you don't. But he always did act on impulse. However, it is no use blaming *you* for what *he* does."

"Not the slightest," replied Jessie. "I am very sorry if he has annoyed you."

"But what *is* this errand? You could not possibly go out alone in London! You are not sufficiently acquainted with the streets."

"I can take a cab if I know my destination. I must go alone."

"Well, fortunately there is no one to put evil constructions upon your conduct here. It is not like a country village."

Jessie smiled, for she knew that for all the

talking in the world, she would carry out *her* idea of friendship. When people were talking about her, they were sparing others who would perhaps suffer more than *she* under the infliction.

"And now, dear Mrs. Campbell, may I go?" I shall be back for lunch, I hope. We are going to Madame Tussaud's this afternoon."

Being so little concerned about this mysterious errand, Mrs. Campbell could make no further objection to her young guest's proceedings, and Jessie smilingly bade her adieu, and took her departure.

"Why does she make herself so tiresome?" thought Jessie. "As if the Squire weren't able to attend to his own business. She must think him still a boy. I wonder that under such surveillance he feels grown up yet."

She found him awaiting her impatiently, with a hansom.

"You are not going alone?" he said. "Where have you been, that you are not ready yet?"

"With Mrs. Campbell."

"She's been pumping, I suppose?"

Jessie smiled.

"She has drawn no water, sir, from my well."

"Bravo! Now be quick and get your bonnet on."

Jessie fled, always glad to do his bidding, having lost all fear that he would even ask her to do anything contrary to her ideas of right.

In five minutes she was warmly arrayed, had ascertained that Gerrie and her brother were out. She entered the hansom with the Squire, and drove to the Portland Road Station, from whence the cab had been ordered the preceding evening.

The Squire used his opera-glasses, and scanned the faces of all the cabmen; but there was not a familiar one among them. Number 5,016 was there. That seemed unaccountable.

"Get down, Jessie. We will speak to Number 5,016."

They both alighted and accosted the man, who explained that he had gone off for a drink, and had changed tickets with Joe, who was a particular chum of his.

"Could you give me that man's address?"

"No, sir; he is always flitting. I know where his mews is in Marylebone Road. I haven't seen him to-day; he gave my ticket up to another man. He—Joe—drives a hansom, and is generally at Victoria. But if you want him for anything he's done, I ain't willing to help you, sir."

"I only want to do him a good turn, not a bad one."

"Then why does he shirk you?"

"That is best known to himself. However, I shall keep a strict look-out for him."

There was nothing more to be done, and the Squire and Jessie presented themselves as usual at luncheon, to Mrs. Campbell's manifest satisfaction. Her mind was always predisposed to uneasiness, where uneasiness was possible.

"Well, Philip," she exclaimed, as they sat down to table, "did you succeed in your mission?"

"Unfortunately not," he replied. "That man is in some way connected with an old servant I had."

"Do you mean married to one?"

"Married or unmarried, I don't know."

"Did I know the servant? What was her name?"

"She was not exactly a servant. Sister Grey, we called her."

"Sister Grey?" cried Gerrie, with very wide open eyes, and growing quite pale.

Her father looked at her attentively. Little he knew that she was aware of the disguise, though not of the cause.

"Yes," he replied, as indifferently as possible. "I fancy that man could tell us her whereabouts, but, if unwilling, he can easily hide himself in the labyrinth of the London streets. Perhaps it is a useless search."

"Oh, do find her!" cried Gerrie, eagerly. "I learnt to almost love her! That horrid man may make her miserable if he could not decamp."

She little knew that that "horrid man" was he who had so seriously injured her father.

"We will do our best," said the Squire, thoughtfully.

And so he did; for he employed a detective to assist him in discovering the whereabouts of

that "horrid man." He felt that if he could make some provision for the unfortunate Sister Grey, he could enjoy his home-coming and his Christmas holiday with a much more contented mind.

But the cabman knew intuitively that his old haunts were watched, and he dreaded meeting the Squire; astounded at his own daring in so cruelly attacking him. Penal servitude, too, stared him in the face; and if it were not for a certain woman—for whom he would risk body and soul—he would have left the country for safety. But he could not leave her, knowing that she was not likely to hold him long. He went about the streets in fear and trembling, not having an idea of disguising himself.

One afternoon he might have been seen skulking outside a City hospital, trying to get up sufficient courage to enter. It was visiting day, and the time was very limited; but he delayed a long time before he made a sudden plunge forward, and passed through the gates. He entered a long corridor, following closely on the footsteps of others, till he reached a women's

ward, and drew near a bed, round which was placed the screen that told of hastening dissolution.

On that clean, narrow bed lay Sister Grey, sinking fast from the effects of typhoid fever. She was fearfully emaciated, and almost unconscious of all around her.

"Kate!"

She started, and opened her eyes wildly.

"Oh, it's you! How you put me in mind of Broughton. You have been good to *me*, Joe, if to no one else."

"What do you think, my lass? I saw the Squire a day or two back."

"The Squire! Philip Hoxton!"

"I did, and I fancy he seed me, and has set men on to track me. He means me harm I reckon."

"Oh, Joe, if ever you have cared anything for me, fetch him, fetch him to me before I die. Be quick; *do*, do go."

"After all the way he has treated thee, scorning thee for all the world as if thou wert a worm under his feet!"

"Never mind. Only fetch him here."

"All right. I will risk my neck for thee. He'll have me took up, that's certain."

"No, he won't, he won't, I tell you. Go, Joe, go."

And Joe went. If it led him to the gallows he could refuse her nothing; but he gave her a long look, a look of the unutterable woe and most desperate despair. She closed her eyes to it, murmuring, "God bless you, poor Joe!"

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon that he reached Weymouth Street. He remembered the house was among the twenties, so he paced backwards and forwards, looking up with terrible earnestness, mixed with fear, for the face he had dreaded through life more than any other. The shutters were closed, the curtains drawn, and the inmates of the house were sipping tea in the drawing-room, making their arrangements for going to German Reed's Entertainment, Corney Grain having caused them infinite amusement the week before.

They agreed to walk so short a distance, the weather being clear and frosty.

And from five till after seven Joe wandered

slowly up and down, scanning each face that passed and growing more and more defiant every moment.

"I don't care what they do to me, I don't care half a farthing. The sooner I'm out of this the better, when she's gone."

Then he observed a party of four leaving a house; he followed them stealthily. Then he passed them quickly, and on reaching the corner of Portland Place turned round and faced them.

He was right in his conjectures. There was the Squire himself, he did not recognise any one else.

They met face to face, and the Squire, thus intercepted, scarcely knew what to say.

"Squire," said Joe, "you've been a-searching for me and I've come a-searching for you, sir. I want you bad, now. Will you come, sir?"

But the Squire demurred. He did not care to put himself in the power of such an utter ruffian.

"It's not me arter all, but some one else as wants you," said Joe.

Seeing the man was fearfully in earnest, they all gazed upon him with different feelings.

Gerrie was terrified, Reginald surprised, Jessie anxious.

The Squire stepped forward, and whispered: "Who is it?"

"Kate, sir; as true as I stand here, she is dying. She may be dead."

"Good heavens! Where is she?"

"In th' hospital. Come on, sir, and do as you will wi' me, only come."

Remorse drove away every other feeling out of the Squire's mind. He did not even doubt the man's words.

"Regie, take the girls," he said, "I must go with this man."

"Oh, papa, don't, don't," said Gerrie, overwhelmed with terror.

The man was not surprised to hear her voice of entreaty. He knew they had met before.

"Don't you be scared, miss."

"Nonsense. Of course, she is not afraid for me. Come, Gerrie, I shall be back before you. Lead on," he continued, turning to Joe.

The man walked on, the Squire followed silently and fearlessly. On meeting a cab, he summoned

its approach, and bade Joe give the address, and get on the box.

Who could tell the wretched reminiscences that surged through his mind during that solitary drive?

They reached the hospital. Joe told the nurse that the Squire was the husband of the dying woman. They were surprised, as he had so distinguished an appearance, and so authoritative a manner. They dared not question him. He was at once conducted to the bedside of the woman he had so terribly wronged. On seeing her ghastly face, he knelt down and covered his face with his hands in an agony of shame and penitence.

"My poor girl," were his only words.

"Philip, oh, Philip! Take care of Vernon; but don't let him rob Gerrie, my sweet, loving Gerrie!"

She gasped between each word, and her tender thought for Gerrie touched him more than anything else could. He did not answer. This woman's death affected him more than had that of his wife. He felt what an unworthy wretch he had been in treating her the way he had, though no less conscious of her inferiority to the gentle

girl she had deliberately prevented from becoming his wife. Love for Kate he had never entertained. Her affection for him had amused him for a time, and then had wearied him, for, mentally, there was nothing in common between them. A little while, and then her companionship was worse than solitude.

Now, seeing her thus at the last extremity, he felt only a sense of the terrible wrong he had done with such deliberate unscrupulousness. At that time the voice of conscience within him was almost silenced, and yet nothing so strong had taken its place. Life had been full of tangles and knots, and he had felt his utter inability to unravel them, and had just followed the bent of his own inclinations, not caring for the opinions of his neighbours. Friends he had none, or they would have had some restraining effect. Conscience was now reawakened. The remembrance of his evil doings made memory hellishly painful.

"I only hope you despise me now as you ought," he said to Kate, feeling unutterably despicable.

"You have been a bad man," she gasped;

"but you have time to change. Oh, Philip Hoxton! when you come where I am now, you will wish you had. I do."

The strong, proud man rose to his feet. He was very pale, and his eyes were full of unshed tears.

"God knows I would undo the past were it possible. I have been seeking you for weeks, that I might make some reparation."

"You couldn't do that, I'm past help now; but I'm not happy, as Pattie was. Good heavens, how I've hated you! It has kept me from church, from God, from heaven!"

"Don't you forgive me now, my poor girl?"

"Yes; but it's too late now—too late."

Philip Hoxton felt he knew nothing about it; but he longed to comfort her, to soothe, if possible, her dying hour.

Joe had heard every word; he pressed forward.

"Sir, tell her it's none too late; tell her about the thief as turned to the Lord wi' his dying breath and were saved."

"He's no need," said the woman, with closed

eyes. "I know all that. But I can't see Him, nor hear Him. It's all but a dream—only on paper. Oh, for Gerrie! Oh, my baby, my baby!"

To hear her sob out those words stabbed the Squire like a dagger. He felt he could not see her die; he must go. He could not comfort her, he could not remember a single text of Scripture, and felt unworthy to utter it if he could.

"Kate, I will fetch Gerrie; she is in town. Shall I?"

"Gerrie? Gerrie near me. Oh, fetch her, sir, fetch her!"

With a sigh of intense relief, the Squire bent down and pressed a kiss on poor Catherine Grey's damp, cold forehead.

"Forgive me, Kate; if you can do *that*, you will yourself be forgiven. Of that one thing I am sure."

"I do—I do; but fetch dear, dear Gerrie, and Vernie, poor Vernie. Oh, dear, I shan't last *so* long."

Joe sat close to her. The Squire hurried from

the harrowing scene as if pursued by ghostly enemies. He felt distracted with varied emotion. He could not endure that his daughter should learn his guilt, and wondered if Kate would spare him. On reaching the Strand he took a hansom, and in a very short time was at Weymouth Street. But the party had not returned from German Reed's. He threw himself into an arm-chair, and surprised his sister by his evident anxiety.

"I want Gerrie to come with me to see that dying woman, Sister Grey. She was so fond of Gerrie."

"But what good could Gerrie do? It will be too late."

"Nothing is too late while we have breath," returned the Squire. "As soon as she comes she must go with me."

And so she did without a moment's hesitation.

Poor Sister Grey had almost gone. Gerrie had but time to throw her arms round her poor wasted form and say a few endearing words.

"Dear, sweet Gerrie," murmured the dying woman, "you saved me."

"Did I? Oh, I am so, *so* glad."

"I'll tell Pattie. Pray, Gerrie, Lord have mercy on——"

A paroxysm of mortal agony convulsed her, and lasted what appeared a cruelly long time. When it ceased, she was unconscious of all around, and so passed away.

Joe could not restrain his sorrow. He groaned and sobbed as only strong men can when overpowered with grief. It was terrible to witness. The Squire, in the presence of Gerrie, could not lose his self-control; she was crying quietly.

He touched Joe on the shoulder, and then took the great coarse hand in his.

"Shake hands, my good fellow, and for that poor creature's sake, let us forgive as we hope to be forgiven."

Joe could only groan.

"I will see you to-morrow," continued the Squire. "Call for me."

CHAPTER XIV.

Catherine Grey was buried at Highgate cemetery, where Reginald officiated at the service, and Joe Atkins acted as chief mourner.

Jessie, Gerrie, and Vernon, all accompanied the Squire in the solitary mourning coach, and the whole of the expenses were thankfully defrayed by him, who by no means could forget his immeasurable debt to the unhappy woman.

At one time he thought he ought to bury her in her native village, and allow all her own relatives to be present at the funeral; but Joe, who now felt as much sympathy and devotion for the Squire, as he previously felt bitterness, persuaded him against that Quixotic plan.

"It'll matter note to her, sir, and will set all the neighbourhood a-talking. Let her lie where I can follow her right up at Highgate.

We've had many a walk up there together. But Kate were like our Pattie. She nobbut cared for you, sir. I were only like a dog, a-follering her about."

The Squire made no response to this remark; but he agreed with Joe that no good could follow from any publicity; if it could, at whatever cost he would have made it, under these new influences.

He consulted with Jessie, talked with her on all his concerns with perfect candour. But he did not make love to her; he used no endearing terms, made not the slightest allusion to the pent-up passion of the last few years. He might have been her father or her brother, and she was grateful.

It was the day before Christmas Eve. These sad circumstances had delayed our friends' return to Broughton till then, so late in the season. The Squire now entertained a generous idea. He would insist upon Joe accompanying them to his native place, and being restored to his family, under his support. No one would dream of raking up the past after so many years, when the magistrate himself, who condemned, now be-

friended him. If they did, he would manage to exculpate the poor fellow. There was snow everywhere in London that day—snow in the fine streets and grand old squares that came down too fast for human activity to sweep away.

The Squire fearlessly faced the storm. He knew Joe's haunts, and walked through Oxford Circus, turning to the right towards the Marble Arch. Even under such a leaden sky, with the soft snow falling, and the pavements greasy and sloppy, the streets were crowded with miscellaneous pedestrians. He reached a short bye-street, where stood a few cabs. In a coffee-house there situated, he expected to find Joe, enjoying his midday meal. The place was crowded with men, and reeked with the hot air of steaming soups, roast meat, and vegetables. The Squire, finding a vacant place, sat down in one of the compartments, surrounded by high wooden backs, over which hung the London dailies. He could not see the men in the one in front or behind him; but he heard a voice he recognised, and listened a moment. It was not Joe's voice that thus arrested his attention. Who's was it?

"It seems a queer tale, Joe."

Joe! was it Joe Atkins who was thus addressed? He strained every nerve to hear the answer.

"Queer or not, it's true, sir. Me and the Squire's as thick as you and me."

"But you will not betray me. You will keep all *our* affairs dark?"

"Trust me for that, sir. I blame mysen more nor you. Pattie was my own, and I did my share in killing her. I shall never forgive myself, never."

The Squire almost gasped for breath. Here then was the gentleman who had wanted to marry Pattie, and whom she could not abide. He did not care to be eavesdropping, and now he had learnt all that was necessary.

He reared himself to his full height, and presented himself before the astonished gaze of Joe Atkins and John Roberts, Esq., of the Lodge, Broughton—the husband of Laura, Jessie's sister. It quite staggered him with astonishment.

"You here!" he cried, uncertain whether he were not in the presence of a still greater scoundrel than himself.

The face of John Roberts betrayed his uneasiness. He went very white, and the Squire observed how much altered he was in his general appearance.

"I have something to say to you both," he continued, "let us have a private room if possible." Finding there was one at their disposal, the three entered together, and the Squire immediately informed them both that he had overheard their conversation sufficiently to form his own conclusion.

"Yes, I am the man who decoyed Pattie Atkins from her home and friends," said John Roberts. "But I loved her. Good heavens! I would give my own soul to restore her to earth again! My life has been one long misery since she died. Say what you like; I care not."

"My good fellow," said the Squire, "as Joe here knows, I am a worse man than you. I have nothing to say."

He had decoyed a poor girl away from her home without giving her the unselfish, undying love that young Roberts had borne for Pattie, therefore his was the greater sin.

One thing, however, was inexplicable. Why

had he not come forward at the police court and vindicated her from the charge of theft?

John Roberts could account for that. In his distracted state of mind at the sudden disappearance of the girl, he had been too agitated to read police news. The case had simply never been brought before his notice until Catherine Grey informed him of all she had witnessed, and of Pattie's final disappearance from the hotel under the care of Arthur, Jessie, and her brother Jacob. Then he was so enraged that he determined to deny all knowledge of a girl who, he thought, had evinced nothing towards him but base ingratitude. So he married Laura, and paid the penalty. The tidings of Pattie's tragic death, while he was on his honeymoon trip, revived all his tenderest recollections of her beauty and simplicity; and his wife did not gain (she did not even try) upon his affection. He settled down to a cold, humdrum, monotonous life with an uncongenial partner. All those similarly situated will understand what that was; and those who have never experienced or witnessed such a state of

things, the keenest imagination could not picture for them.

The Squire was soon on friendly relations with John Roberts, and declared his errand.

Joe was grateful. He felt as if a dead weight had been suddenly lifted from him. To return to Broughton, and walk about with head erect, fearing no man, had been the dream of his life; and that he owed this to the Squire cancelled all the past. He accepted his old enemy's assistance, and arrangements were made whereby the whole party were to travel by the same train northwards, that afternoon, by the three o'clock express.

"I met John Roberts in town to-day," said the Squire, at luncheon. "He agrees to go down with us this afternoon. Everything packed, young ladies? Eh, Vernie, my boy?"

Yes, everything was ready, and Regie was to be on the platform to accompany his *fiancée*.

That was a joyful home-coming. Even Bolton expressed a half-hearted desire to see the master again. There had been rumours and surmises; but they all stood in wholesome awe of the Squire,

in spite of his shortcomings, and being Christmas time every one was generously disposed.

Joe went straight to his old mother's cottage, with the joyful intelligence that he would leave her no more; that he and the Squire had made friends, and that if he had only known it, there was not a jollier good fellow living.

Gardener Atkins heard the news from Miss Gerrie herself, and so did Jacob, both of whom decided they would go straight to grannie's and share her happiness.

Reginald and Jessie rejoiced to find with what heartfelt interest their parents had entered into the schemes Arthur and the girls had inaugurated for the well-being of Broughton inhabitants.

They had so much to tell that time passed quickly, and more pleasantly, on this home-coming, than ever before.

Jones and Bolton rejoiced with Gerrie at Joe Atkins' sudden reappearance among them, and Vernon only spoke solemnly of Sister Grey having died in a hospital, and that they had all gone to her funeral. Gerrie never told any one of her encounter with Joe in Van-dale, and the

Squire never told how deadly had been the fight between him and the man he now so generously befriended.

In his turn Joe Atkins was equally reticent. He never breathed a word of his relation with young Mr. Roberts, of his knowledge of Kate Grey's wrongs, of the parentage of Vernon.

Revelations would have been disastrous; so revelations there were none, though there was not a coward among them.

Jessie informed no one, not even Gerrie, of the attachment that existed between her and the Squire; for, though he now never alluded to it, she knew him too well to think for a moment that he had changed.

And the Squire watched her and waited. He did not deserve to step into bliss supreme so suddenly. Besides, he would wait and see if any more eligible suitor arrived for Jessie, than one with such a lamentable past.

Again he would try if she really loved him enough to forsake all others. He would not, if he knew it, make another matrimonial blunder. Almost better hang himself. Meanwhile, Gerrie's

marriage was talked over frequently, and at last the time was fixed.

It was to be during the summer months, when Reginald had a holiday from his now arduous duties.

Until that day the Squire determined to say no word of love to Jessie. It was still a subject of regret to him that Regie should marry his daughter. But it did not make his union with Jessie illegal, but, to say the least of it, peculiar, if not deplorable.

And the Squire was the last man in the world to worry himself about such a matter. If Jessie loved him, and her father would consent, marry her he would. He had no more right to spoil her happiness than he had to stand in his daughter's way. Such a case was not unprecedented, and if it were, he would venture to be the pioneer.

He was troubled at times concerning Vernon, his supposed heir, who, really, had no legal right of inheritance. He determined to do the boy justice as well as Gerrie. What he did, remains to be seen.

There was a change in the Squire. He no

longer read prayers, but made Gerrie do it for him. He determined no longer to be distinguished for a false sanctity, even of manner. He rather felt more inclined to tell all the world what a scoundrel he had been, which proved his repentance sincere.

So Gerrie read them in her clear, young voice, and he listened, or did not listen, as the case might be. Sometimes they oppressed him, sometimes pleased, but not often.

They disputed about Gerrie's wedding. She wished a very simple one; and her father declared that such a tame affair would defraud the Broughtonians. Everything must be done in proper style. Gerrie had to yield, and pass through the trying ordeal with becoming modesty. Aunt Campbell, of course, came down to superintend arrangements. She was much pleased with the marriage, and gave her niece handsome wedding presents. Such occupation reminded her pleasantly of old days. Moreover, she insisted upon Gerrie and her friend coming up to town to make necessary purchases, when Gerrie visited the locality in which she hoped to spend a great

part of her life. Enough to say, she was by no means dismayed.

Reuben May and Jacob Atkins stood together under the shadow of the elder-tree, above the old church wall.

The wedding had taken place that morning, the bride and bridegroom had passed out of their old life into the new, driven with showers of rice and old slippers, and heartfelt blessings, from the Hall gates. The excitement had subsided, and left ravages on Jacob's handsome face.

"God bless them both, they deserve it," he said to Reuben; "but it was hard for me, old fellow."

"I saw it was," said Reuben, with brotherly affection.

"Talk of Jacob's love to Rachel, that was nothing to mine for Miss Gerrie; but, then, what was Rachel compared with *her?*"

"Come now, Jacob, don't think of her so any more; don't, lad, it grieves me, and it would grieve her more."

"Her! Grieve her! Good heavens, Reuben,

you don't imagine thas she even guesses such a common fellow as I could love! The thought of her fills heart and soul alike. I shall never change—not even in eternity."

Reuben did not know what to say. He knew that Jacob had a poet's soul; but he knew that, with all his common sense, he could have continued in his infatuation if he had so willed it. But he had willed otherwise. He loved both the young ladies, but not as Jacob loved Gerrie. That was wonderful—a love only a Dante could experience, and Jacob had a Dante soul.

"I don't believe that disembodied spirits are equal," he went on. "I don't believe that Pattie and Mr. Arthur are together now. Pattie had not reached Mr. Arthur's inner life. She could not mentally enjoy what he could. She will be in a lower sphere. Whether they will ever be together, I don't know."

"What a curious idea!" said Reuben. "I don't agree with it."

"Don't you? Do you think that people who could not have spiritual communion down here with each other, will be equally endowed as

soon as they die? I don't. I think we must strive down here to reach a higher, purer atmosphere, and the more spiritual we become on earth, the higher we shall be hereafter. So I must meet Miss Gerrie. I look forward to that; it gives me courage, perseverance."

"There's something in it," said Reuben; "perhaps you are right."

"Then you are going to marry a wife who cannot follow you, for you soar so much higher than it is possible for her. What does she think about?"

"Why, she thinks about *me*," replied Reuben, laughing. "I know I am a very poor subject; but the poor child glorifies me almost as much as you glorify Miss Gerrie."

"Ah, well, that is better. She will try to come up to your standard. And I have my end in view. To clasp once more Mr. Arthur's hand in eternity, and to greet Miss Gerrie when she comes. But come along, let's be going."

Reuben and he walked on; Reuben mentally convinced that Jacob was making himself less and less fit for terrestrial things, however suit-

able he might be for the world to come. But he loved him as a brother, and pitied him as a friend.

Christmas again had come and gone, and the Squire had still kept silence.

But when the New Year dawned, he was up with the first faint streaks of morn.

"This shall be indeed a New Year to me," he whispered to himself. "This shall be the crowning day of my life, when I will take my little darling in my arms and bid her be mine till death us do part. What on earth has kept me doing so, for the last twenty-four months, I know not. But the little chit is my master. There was no power on earth to oppose me, save herself. Her dauntless spirit, unbound, unfettered in its frail tenement, has ruled mine, and kept me bridled and curbed. Curious, I can't understand it. However, I am going to break loose to-day. Ah, Jessie, take care!"

He gave a low laugh, a laugh full of tenderness untold, and keen delight.

He and Vernon enjoyed a good breakfast

together; and Vernon comprehended that, if his father was even inclined to grant him all his heart's desire, the auspicious occasion had arrived.

"Father, I want a bicycle."

"Well done, my boy. I will tell you this evening whether you may have one or not."

"Oh, that will be jolly. And, father, may I go to the Rectory and see Jessie?"

"At your peril, sir!"

The words were spoken harshly, the voice was loud; but there was such an expression of joy and hopefulness in his father's face, that made him look almost a boy again. Vernon ventured another request:

"Father, may I go with Jones to Lutterfield?"

"You may, my son."

"Isn't Joe a capital chap? He's going to take me to skate."

"Capital. Don't break your leg."

Vernon laughed. There had been no prayers at all that morning. Since Gerrie left home they had been very irregularly read. The Squire was longing for another voice to take her place.

He went himself to the Rectory. Jessie saw

him out on the snowy path, ensconced in his huge top-coat, and ran to let him in as usual, quite unprepared for his greeting. He caught her bodily in his arms, and pressed his lips to hers.

"My beloved, I could not wait another day, not another hour. Take me to your father."

But she could not just there and then; she was too much surprised.

"Come in here, then," he said, turning to the dining-room, in which glowed the brightest of fires, and Dick lay on the hearth-rug with pussy. "It is done, Jessie," he said, looking down at her. "I am sorry if my audacity has shocked your prudery; but it can't, nay, it shan't be undone, but done again, my darling."

But Jessie thought it the most natural thing in life, and would not have it undone for all the wealth of Egypt; nor had she the slightest objection to a repetition of the offence, while poor Dick laughed and clapped his hands with glee.

When they were both sobered down, without waiting to be conducted thither, the Squire made his way upstairs to the Rector's sanctum, where he soon made his requests known. To him he

made no confession of past offences; enough that his beloved knew all, pardoned, and loved him, and knowing this, that from henceforth he had set his heart on doing that which was right in God's sight, who sees not as man sees.

In spite of the peculiar connections that would arise from the marriage, the Rector gave his consent to their union.

True love existed between them, and true love is a thing of gradual development; with it moral growth also is a certainty.

We do not prophesy for them a life of perfect harmony; but they both have a high ideal to inspire them, and this ideal will impel them to work for righteousness at home and abroad, and eventually lead them to that perfect state which is immeasurably beyond all finite comprehension, where the unfathomable mysteries of life will be explained, and all the amazing contradictions of human nature reconciled.

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